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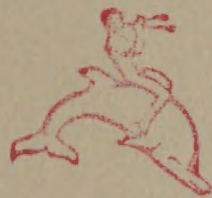
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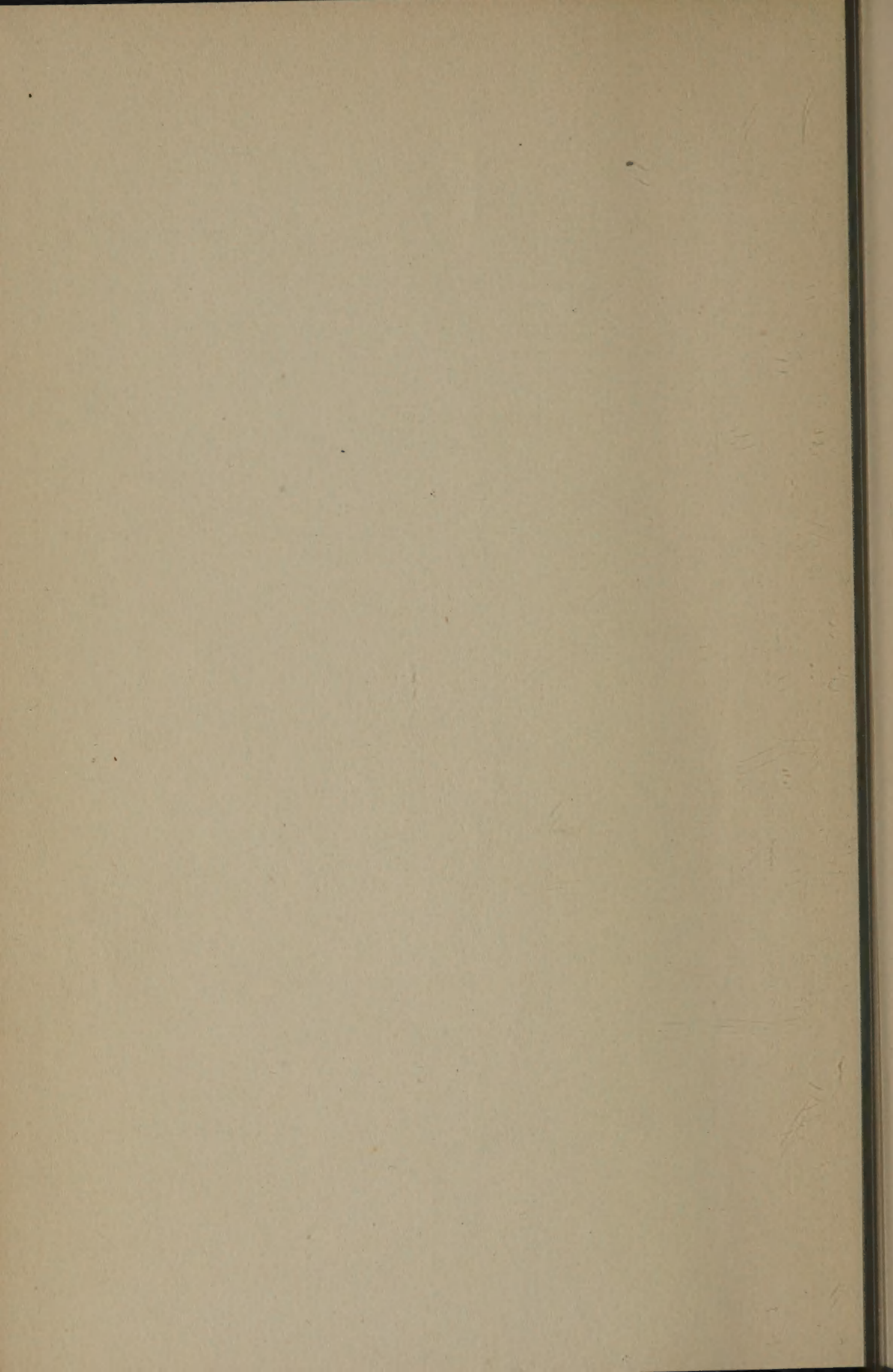
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By Mary Rogers Bangs

HIGH BRADFORD.

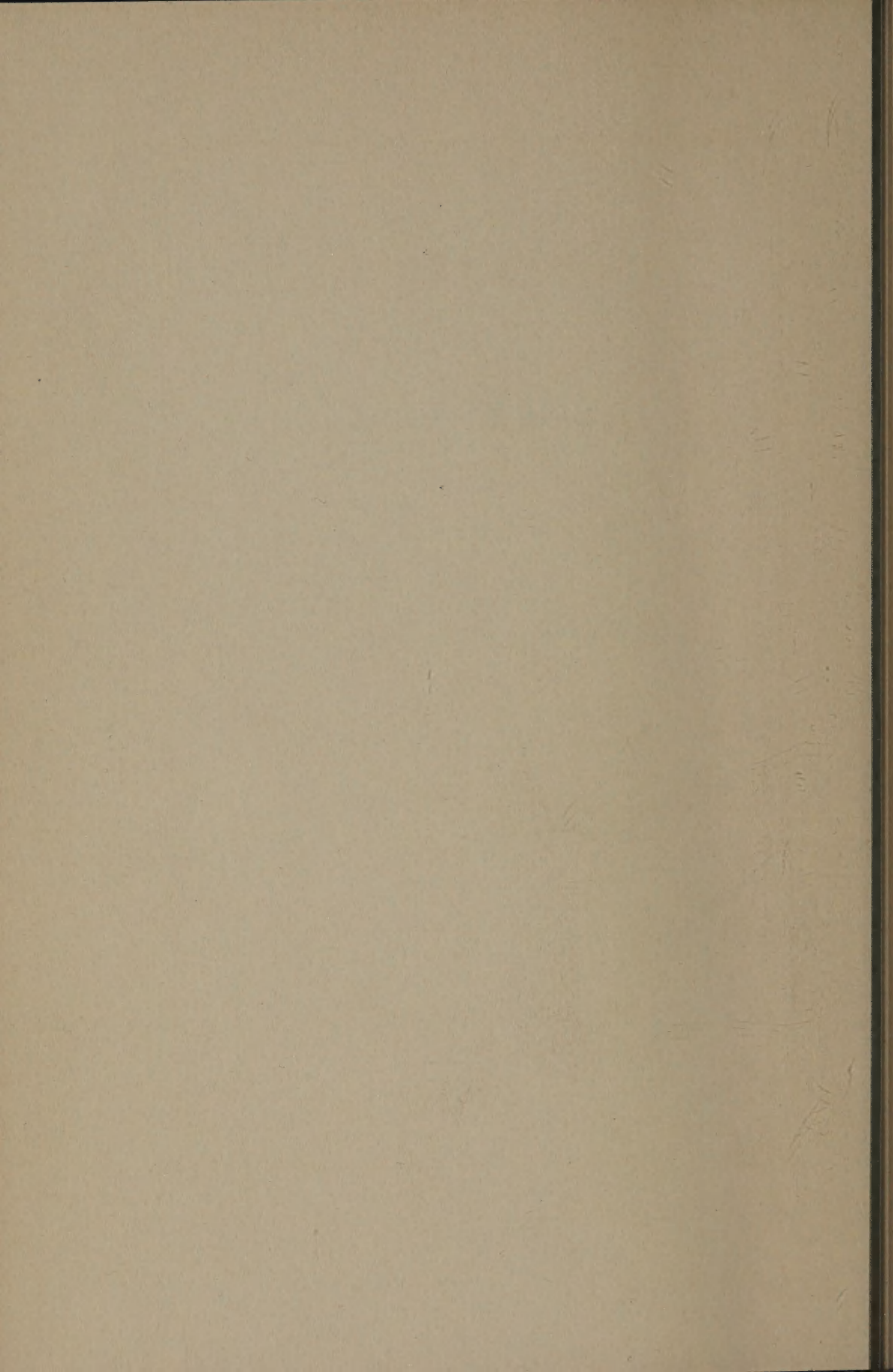
JEANNE D'ARC, THE MAID OF FRANCE.

With illustrations in color.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

BOSTON AND NEW YORK

HIGH BRADFORD

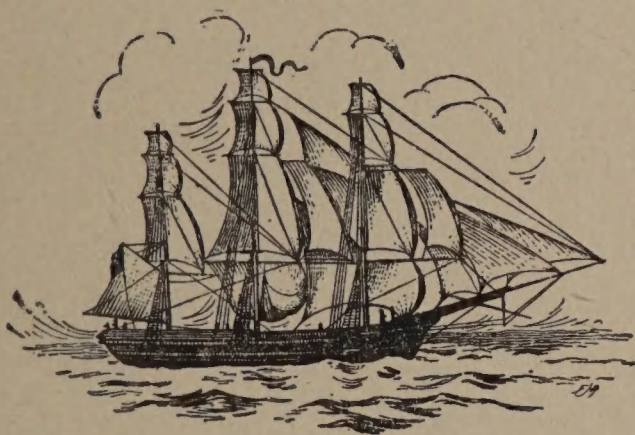


HIGH BRADFORD

BY

MARY ROGERS BANGS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

The Riverside Press Cambridge

1912

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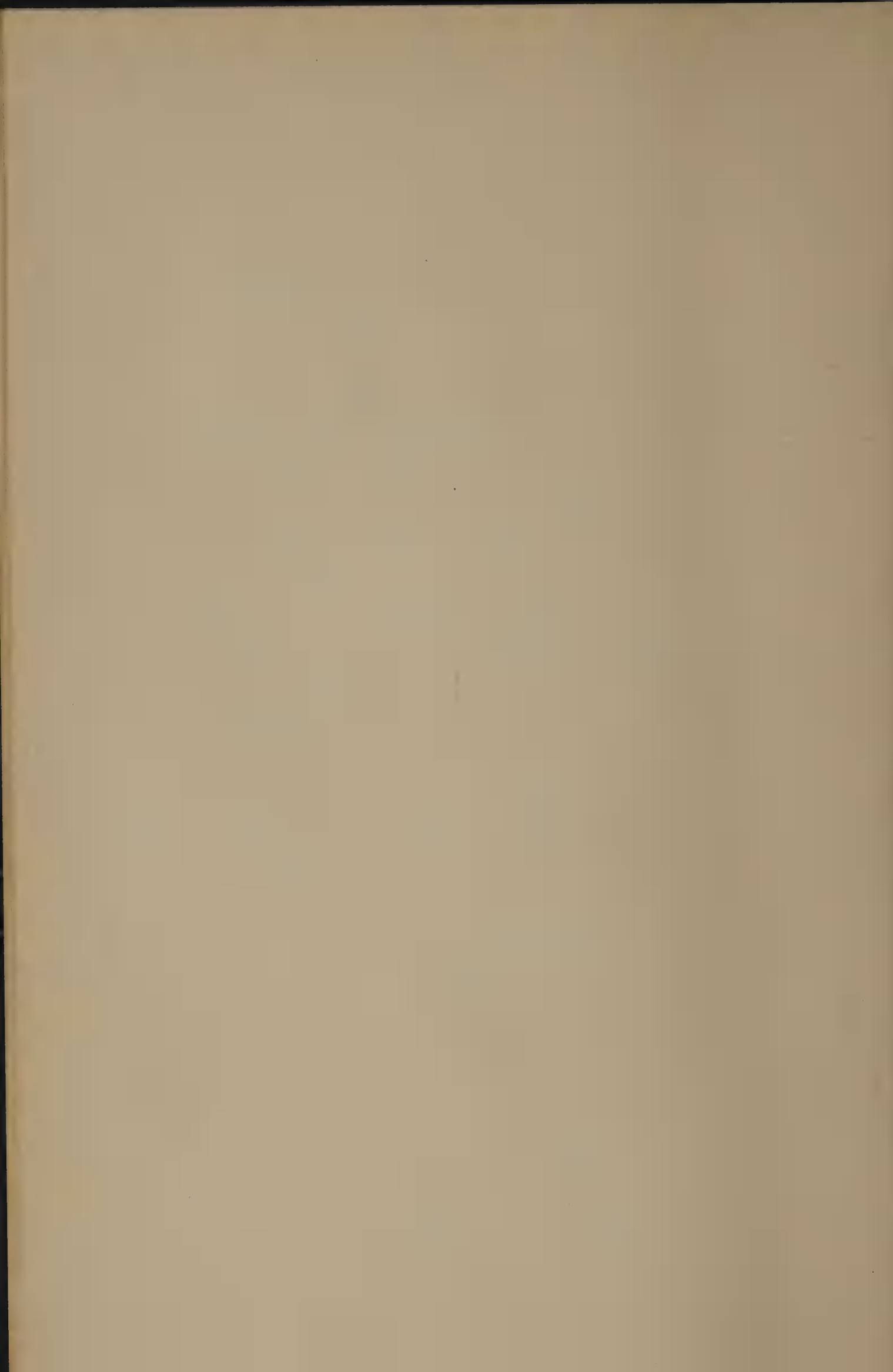
Published April 1912

TO

C. A. D.

LOVER OF OLD SIMPLICITIES

HIGH BRADFORD





I

BRADFORD—High Bradford, the fishing-villages beyond slyly named it—stood at ease on the shores of a bay which the long arm of the dunes held lovingly as a jewel fit for the adornment of a fine new world. Behind the white sands were meadows and upland moors and lakes set deep among wooded hills; and at the back of all this serene beauty the sea beat ceaselessly, tearing and rending the fabric of the shore in winter storms, building up or levelling at its will the futile deprecating barriers of sand. From sea to

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bay the winds blew back and forth, gathering in their path all the fragrance of the land from pine and bayberry and clover meadow, from wild rose and honeysuckle, from thoroughwort and goldenrod and asters, and all the indistinguishable sweets which the yellow bee finds. North, south, east, and west brought salt and more salt: for nowhere was the sea far distant, and fog was as likely to come walking in over the fields from the north as from the south. But summer and winter, in foul weather and fair, there was the rush of the tireless wind. On gray days, luminous as pearls, it brushed through the woods with the lightness of multitudinous wings; on shining mornings the brisk housewife of the north stepped about rolling back the mists, and in winter, snows easily turned to rain in the soft moist fingers of the moving air.

From the beginning of things, hardy seamen of the Old World may have dared the shifting dangers of the shoals, and rested awhile in some secure inlet before they cut their way back through the grim Atlantic. But Scrooby

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Pilgrims, burning with love of freedom as they saw it, colonized the wooded country beyond the dunes; and their descendants, true to the enterprise of their birthright, turned back to the sea for their fortune, which, even in the humble day of its beginning, meant to them the profit of a man's mind as well as his body, and their decree that the colony's share of the fisheries should go "for and towards a free school . . . for the good and benefit of posterity" bore the just fruit of such planting. Then all adventurers, whether for their souls' good or their pockets', fared forth on the highway of the sea. English Puritans, who had dared their great adventure for God and founded the commonwealth of a new world, followed the buccaneers who beat out fresh paths for the old peoples in the "spacious time of great Elizabeth"; and these, in turn, gave place to the men who were to write a new chapter in the unending romance of trade. Londoners had invented their "United Company of Merchant Venturers of England Trading to the East Indies," the "Honorable John Company";

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and their splendid frigates, built wide in beam for precious cargoes and equipped to deal with any enemy who dared molest them, made royal progresses in the grand old manner, only to be beaten out of the running by Yankee captains, who crowded on sail every hour in the twenty-four and were around the world and back again before the great East-Indiamen, floating along at night like seafowl asleep on the waters, lumbered into port. And of these ships' commanders Bradford, from her green resting-place beyond the dunes, sent forth more than any town so small: men who knew not only "the way of a ship in the midst of the sea," but the way of a merchant in the world's market. They "ran her easting down" beyond the Cape, where the brave "westerlies" were whip and spur, as easily as a horseman sweeps out for the goal, and prizes of fortune and fame were set for their winning. They were eager to go out, and as eager to return; and the austere blood of their fathers was enriched and tempered by love of the gentle country of home and the long slant of the seas.

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A fit type of such men was Captain Elkanah Clark, whose old farm stood near the end of a lane beyond the Bradford stage road. General Clark, some called him: for in the forty years since he had used the sea, he had drilled militia and helped make clean the law of the land; and whether sailor or statesman or gentleman farmer, he had cherished his small estate until it bloomed and bore fruit beyond any other in the village; and ten years before he left the sea, he had torn down his father's low house and built the square one with the two great chimneys, and not a sloping ceiling about it except in the garret where sea-chests stood under the eaves.

Elkanah was a child when America cut her moorings to the old country; but he was old enough to command his ship and to read Johnny Crapaud a chapter in Yankee resolution by 1793, when business at French ports was on a basis of go-as-you-please, which meant as the port officer pleased. On his second voyage as master, Cap'n Elkanah, having sold a cargo of food-stuffs at Havre for the gold

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snugly bestowed in his money-belts, was asking for his papers.

“All in good time,—a week, a month, a month or so, my friend,” responded the officer.

“Sir?” Cap’n Elkanah, a brave figure in his fine new clothes of the latest picturesque fashion, looked down from his great height with blue eyes flashing and lean jaw firm set: too much of an aristocrat by half in the sight of one who was accustomed to recognize and hate the evidence of gentle blood.

“In your turn, my good fellow,—two months at the latest,” pronounced Monsieur Importance, who, the day before yesterday, had been selling fish on the pier.

“That is the extreme of injustice,” said Elkanah Clark. “I’ll not leave this office until my case has been called.”

“Your Yankee, where is he?” asked a deputy officer two days later.

“*Parbleu!* it was discharge him or bury him. For the round twenty-four hours did he sit at that door without food or sleep. One

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can see why these *gamins* whipped England — with our help.”

And within the quarter-year, Cap’n Elkanah was back with more flour and rice which the hungry Frenchmen must buy at a gain for Yankee pockets.

He plied his trade in every port where trade was good, — in Holland and Germany, and then home by the “north-about” through stormy Orkneys and Hebrides; at Kronstadt and Archangel, — his was the first Yankee trading-flag in the White Sea; and there were long voyages to the Far East, and short dangerous dashes through the piratical waters of the Spanish Main. Whatever adventure he spoke became his friend, for he bore the touchstone of success, — daring tempered by judgment. As the years passed, the leaping flame of his youth had been subdued to a glow of love and just living; and Rachel, his granddaughter, when she looked upon his reverend age, always bethought her of a passage in one of her school prize-books, for, like Philip Sydney, he was of a “lovely and familiar gravity.”

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Mary Seabury, the slip of a girl who had lived in the little old house beyond the Clarks' at the end of the lane, was the fit mate for such a man. She bore his children, and brought them up in the fear of the Lord ; she managed and saved, and when Elkanah was absent in the years after her father died and the little house was closed, she ran the two farms with the help of Azubah, who came to her when the last baby was born, and of Felix Connelly, who looked upon the estate as his own. Before she died, her four strong sons were out in the world, making good their inheritance of righteousness and mercy ; and in the old square house, Cap'n Elkanah, served by the love of his widowed daughter, Caroline Sears, and her daughter, Rachel, grew into years.

With the sons of the house had been reared a child by adoption, who, in his turn, had "gone to sea" and commanded his ship, and the sea had swallowed up both commander and ship. Out of mystery he had come, and the unknown claimed his going. For Bradford his story had begun with that second voyage of

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Cap'n Elkanah's during the French Revolution, when at Havre, as he walked down to the dock on the eve of departure, a veiled woman had stopped him.

"You are the American captain, sailing tomorrow?" Her voice had the authority of a compelling need, and, with the words, she placed a sleeping child in his arms, which, for very surprise, closed about the soft bundle. "Take him," she begged. "He is a good child, gently bred. You may call him René Rousseau. His father—" Her voice fell to a whisper. "These wolves have him. But plans are laid. We know you and your home. We shall follow, never fear. But do you take the child."

Cap'n Elkanah brought the boy home to his Mary, but no fortune or kin followed from France. He might be called René Rousseau: the grim Terror cut the cord at that knot. And René married at twenty, and was "lost at sea," and his daughter, Zellaphine, married Bela Mayo, and their daughter, Polly, was best friends with Rachel Sears, who lived in the old house on the lane.



II

POLLY and Rachel were the leaders of the Bradford little folk, and Polly could invent more games, from giants and lion-traps among the pines to Pilgrim mothers and galleons on the beach, than even Rachel's imagination and executive hand could bring to flower. Maternal disapproval cut off many a follower in their train; and when small Anne Howes, as Undine, nearly lost her life in Wehasset Pond, an embargo ended one summer's faring-forth upon the sea of fancy. But such isolation sealed their friendship the

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closer. Polly was like a spaniel starting up the game and scurrying back to Rachel to bear her out in the adventure. Once, when they were very little girls, she had coaxed Rachel to a visit upon old Peter Gaunt, the hermit who lived in a house near the woods and was known to drink and play the fiddle. When he drank, the boys said he was as ugly as a pirate; but Polly wanted to hear the fiddle. Hand in hand the two scampered across the fields, and knocked at his swinging door. Old Peter answered with a growl, which turned to an exclamation of astonishment as he viewed his small visitors. Polly would have fled the apparition, but Rachel stood her ground.

“Please, Mr. Gaunt, we have come to hear your fiddle,” piped she, in a thin voice.

“Sounded’s if you were in a feather bed,” Polly afterward told her.

“Fiddle, is it?” chuckled Peter. “Well, come in, and good welcome to ye.”

He dusted off two backless chairs, which the children mounted and sat upon with their

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toes turned out stiffly on the rounds, their smooth pigtails strained back like a rabbit's apprehensive ears, their hands clasped tight to conceal the trembling of their thin bare arms. Peter went into an inner room for his fiddle.

"Shall we run?" whispered Polly.

"No, we must be p'lite," sternly admonished Rachel.

Then the old man sat down before them, and played "Money Musk," and "Invitation," and "Thou great and sovereign Lord of all," until the children forgot their fears, and when they shook hands at parting, thanked him eagerly and said they would come again.

Yet, though feminine servitors might be deflected from their train, two more or less constant adherents the girls had: John Dillingham, who was always father to Rachel's mother when the play was backwoodsman's camp in the pines or enchanted castle in the lower garden, and Scotto Clark, eldest son eaten by the wolves or the robber baron who stole fair ladies and unearthed gold. Rachel

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always played maternal parts, and Polly preferred fairy godmother or a lovely captive escaping from the savages as offering more scope to her fancy.

Scotto's father was Cap'n Elkanah's youngest son, a merchant and shipowner, and the mother had died when Scotto was a little fellow. When school was done, he was always glad to escape from the gloomy city house, and soon it became the established order for him to spend all vacations at his grandfather's farm. A sensitive, excitable, affectionate child, he kept every one on the run between the poles of exasperation over his pranks and delight in his wit and warm-hearted repentances for outrageous misdemeanor. The small neighbor, John, although younger by a year, was Scotto's governor, and his steady hand pulled them out of many a scrape where they had justly earned bread-and-water punishment. Their mutual allegiance never weakened, though they were not averse to the sport of "teasing the girls," or even, when the attention of other fellows was distracted by more distant affairs,

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to spending happy hours of play with them in the domain of Gran'ther Clark, which was as if foreordained for such enterprise.

The boys had built a secret lair near Wehasset Pond, which lay just off the field path that led down to the bay, and Polly and Rachel knew no dearer wish than to penetrate the spot. But here masculine condescension drew the line: girls should know their place, and particularly should they learn the basic fact that a man must have his reserves. Nor, indeed, was any one, male or female, made free of the mystery: John and Scotto had cut their wrists and sworn bloody fealty to the secret clan. Here, on sunny afternoons, they lay in ambush and held long whispered colloquies as to surprising the foe, or ventured forth to fish for hornpout cachalots, or skulked out through dense forest paths to tomahawk a paleface. Here, too, was the starting-point of piratical expeditions, in the rakish, low-lying craft moored in the Bight of Banjorum. Once Scot had poled out too far in the *Pirate Bride*, which looked remarkably like an old door, and

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had to sit there like a frog on a lily-pad until wind and current slowly propelled him to the opposite coast. Then, the next day being rainy and girls safely housed, John organized a relief expedition, the *Bride* was retaken, manoeuvred under the lee of a hostile shore, hauled up in the Bight and refitted with cutlasses and guns, when she hoisted the black flag and sallied forth to capture three galleons loaded with bullion.

This was all when little boys wore roundabouts and loose trousers to the ankle, and little girls had black silk aprons and pantallettes and cavernous bonnets like their mothers'. And in due time John grew to his six-feet-two and was off on his first voyage as master of a ship, and Scotto was a very fine gentleman who ruled the town — kitchen and hall — during flying visits in the intervals of sea-going and business ventures undertaken in one corner or another of the world on the pretext of enlarging his father's trade. And Polly and Rachel were young ladies, with softly flowing skirts which had not yet billowed out into

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crinoline ; and though bonnets might be large, the arch was filled with flowery wreaths which nestled sweetly against a young face.

On a spring morning, when clouds were floating lazily in the pale sky as if they dreamed of hot August days, the two girls were driving home through a "blind" road overgrown with scrub oak and pine. The wagon was heaped with sprays of the trailing arbutus—Mayflower, they called it—which they had been unearthing from crisp coverts among last year's leaves. Their leghorn bonnets crowned the fragrant cargo, and Polly's dark curls were bobbing all the wrong way, which, nevertheless, seemed wholly right as they framed her small face the more archly. Even Rachel's braids were ruffled by dodging low branches that drooped over the wood-bound road.

"I don't care if he is your cousin. I give him away. I give him to the goose who will take him," blustered Polly, as she struggled to pin up a rent in her sleeve before they should emerge on the highway.

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"I will take him," said Rachel. She flicked the horse into a trot; they were skirting a little blue pond set deep in wooded banks.

"You!" Polly nearly swallowed a pin as she turned blank eyes of astonishment upon the quiet girl beside her.

Rachel was looking straight between the horse's ears.

"He has said that he loves me, and I—love him." She turned now and looked the confused Polly in her troubled eyes.

"But—but he has flirted. He has flirted with me, and—oh, dear!"

"Yes, he has flirted."

"But Scotto Clark is like water. He will run through your fingers, and be off to the next township, to the next world for aught I know, before you can say—"

"Dear Polly, I know Scotto Clark."

"And he is your own cousin. Your own mother's brother's child. He is like a brother."

"Not quite a brother."

There was silence between the girls, and old Major picked his way across a shaky cul-

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vert which was frequently submerged in winter. On either hand now were the ponds, one a basin where summer lilies would be rocking, and the other a miniature sea, illimitable because it turned sharply around a wooded headland, and foam-tipped waves broke on the pebbly beach cut by their wheel. Polly, like a cockleshell sailor caught in a current stronger than any previous excursion could have led him to expect, whiffled short around on an opposite tack.

“Rachel, I believe, I do believe that you are made for each other. You are so steady — and perhaps all boys veer a little. You’ll make a man of Scot. His heart’s as big as the bay. Think how he sat up night after night with Beriah Pratt; and he’s in and out of every house, rich and poor, the first day he’s in town; and how quick he is! I’ll never forget how he pulled Cap’n Dillingham’s Di Vernon out of the ditch when she’d pretty nearly kicked her way out of sight. Any other man would have let the black mud get her.” Rachel was looking about for the cart track

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that diverged through gray mossy fields and Polly gathered eloquence with the impetus of her own momentum. "Ray, he's your man," she announced, as one who descries the beacon through dissolving mists. "And I shall give you the best pair of undersleeves I can begin this very afternoon, the twenty-ninth of April, eighteen hundred and —"

"There, Polly. There'll be time enough. Scot's going over to Hamburg, you know, for Uncle Crete, and won't be back until next fall. And I have n't given him his answer yet."

"So you gave it to me, Miss Rachel!"

They had drawn up before the low white house where Polly and her mother lived, — "Aunt Zellaphine's," every one called it: for Bela Mayo was away so much on his long trading-voyages they almost forgot there was a master, — and Polly was dividing their Maying with a deft impartial hand. She heaped the half in her bonnet, which, with the absorption in trifles that enhanced her charm, she succeeded in whirling aloft at arm's length by the strings without losing a

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petal. Rachel never could learn that trick with her basket when the children went for swamp huckleberries, but Polly had it to perfection.

“I won’t tell,” she cried, as she disappeared behind the lilacs that sheltered “Aunt Zella-phine’s ” from the road. “Good luck.”



III

A BLOSSOMY path across the fields and through a meadow where the brook was spanned by weatherbeaten logs made a short cut from the Clark farm to an old house that was built by one of the earliest settlers of Bradford. The house was on a knoll, terraced up from the meadows by orchard and kitchen garden, trim flowerbeds and lawns ; and if you chose to go home by the white winding road — a dusty walk in summer — overshadowing elms and great silver poplars made the way beautiful. On an evening in April, the easier path

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was by the longer road, and at five o'clock, precisely, Cap'n Elkanah and his daughter, Mrs. Sears, were taking it. For Cap'n and Mrs. Edward Dillingham were giving a high tea to the other captains and their wives who had made the port of home, and from such a company General Clark was never absent. Especially would he have been missed from any festivity at the Dillingham house, for between him and Madam Desire was a friendship tried in the frost and sun of eighty years. They had learned their letters together in the dame school taught by Miss Peda Dillingham in an upper room of this same old house, where the eaves sloped to mysterious cupboards terrible to naughty children; and before Desire Winslow returned there as the bride of young Kenelm Dillingham and Elkanah had married Mary Seabury, there may have been the first blush of a shy courtship between them. But the two brides were fast friends, and as the years went on the path across the fields was worn by their feet and their children's and their children's children's; and after Kenelm

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and Mary died, there was the same old friendship between Elkanah and Desire, a friendship sweet with the memory of past joy and sorrow, and shining with such devotion and grace as should challenge the chivalry of youth to grow into like maturity.

The children of Madam Desire were widely scattered even for a Bradford family : all the boys, by nature, had taken to the sea, and one had become a merchant in Australia and a daughter was married to his English partner, another was in Penang; and another still was a pioneer in Oregon, where he was working a profitable saw and grist mill in that rich and thinly populated territory. Cap'n Edward, the youngest son, lived in the old house, and his wife, Mercy, was a faithful and affectionate daughter to her husband's mother.

After their marriage, she had gone several voyages with Cap'n Edward, and, having a turn for mathematics, had whiled away some long hours by studying navigation, with her young husband as schoolmaster. One wintry season in the twenties, they were bound home

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from California, where they had packed a cargo of hides and had replaced their mate, who had taken another vessel, with a man they picked up at the little port of San Diego. They had run well down to the southward when Cap'n Edward fell ill of brain fever, but not before he had put his mate in irons: for the Cap'n ruled his men like a father, and the newcomer, whose oaths, like those of the buccaneer in the chronicle, were proof enough that "he had heard of God," had mistaken that clemency for meekness. Winter was shutting down as they neared the Horn, and Mercy Dillingham and the mate were the only ones aboard who knew the science of navigation. He begged to be released.

"No," said she. "The Cap'n put you in irons for good cause, and in irons you shall stay till we make New York."

And in irons he did stay; and Mercy nursed her delirious husband, and brought him and the ship safe home. But never did navigator rejoice more to see the "Magellan clouds" sink below the horizon, or to make the North Star,

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“first land beyond the Horn”; and they never again set sail, for Edward was broken by his illness, and she, who had dared once too often the malignant seas of the Far South, could not bear even the gentle adventure of a voyage to the city by “packet.”

The next year her son was born, and in due time went the way of his forebears; and his mother, when a howling nor'easter piled the snows high, kept her vigil until the gray dawn for those who go down to the sea. And Cap'n Edward, farmer that he was, who should tread no planks more unsteady than the meadow bridge, was famous for his salt-water maxims, and used a landsman's lingo only when a sea term failed. John, the pirate of Banjorum Bight, was their son, and as he was due from a year's voyage to Australia and Calcutta, this tea-party was designed to clear the decks for younger happenings.

The table was set in the east room. Their everyday meal was eaten in the great middle room where the brick oven was: for the Dillinghams had never turned that into a

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supernumerary parlor, after the more modern fashion, to build living-room and summer and winter kitchens in succeeding lean-tos and sheds. Desire and Mercy agreed in their pleasure of using the long room, flanking the east and west parlors, to cook and eat in: on winter nights it was the warmest corner in the solid old house, and in summer it was cool with the sweet air drawing through from the gardens. Desire's bedroom led off from the corner where the back stairs made a precipitous flight to the floor above, and by another door she could step into the west room, sacred to foreign relics and haircloth furniture in most Bradford houses, but in daily use by these comfortable Dillinghams. Across the hall, where the builder had raised leisurely English stairs, with a landing for the tall clock that had survived the buffeting of a winter Atlantic, Mercy was putting the finishing touches to her bountiful table, whose fine old silver had graced many a gathering of the brethren in a manor house across the sea.

Mercy Dillingham was no such progressive

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woman as her youthful exploit might have indicated, but a gentle creature save when circumstance challenged the Old England in her fibre. Famous even among Bradford cooks, that reputation was her pride ; and there was no surer road to her discomfiture than allusion to her enforced captaincy of the *Silver Trident*. When some city cousins, who had taken up the new fad of “woman’s rights,” asked her to speak to their Social Circle, she replied that the privilege of cooking Edward Dillingham’s three meals a day was right enough for her ; and certainly she was a picture of serene domesticity as she began to brew the tea — tea of a royal blend sent to Madam Desire by a son in the China trade — when a subdued hum from the west room indicated that the guests were assembling. Her white hair, which had begun to turn in those long watches when she had fought her way around the Horn, was banded smoothly about her face and folded back under a matronly cap. The rich folds of her black satin, given her by Edward on their first voyage to France, fell from her trig waist ;

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an embroidered muslin tucker and undersleeves were fastened close about her shapely throat and wrists.

Cap'n James Howes and his wife Rosilla, who had just "arrived" from the East, were the guests of honor; and as the company gathered about the table, every one was eager to hear their news of cities on the other side of the world and of friends they had spoken in passing. For then a man was more likely to hail his neighbor on the route down by Rio and across to the Cape than on the main street at home, and a good voyage to Calcutta was no more of an expedition than the wood-drive around the ponds to the west'ard. The sea's road was more familiar than the by-ways of the land when it was easier to sail up and down the coast than to trust the uncertain progress of stage and steam; and "round the Horn" was a safer road to the Eldorados of the Pacific than an overland route by prairie schooner. Boston, New York, Baltimore, "New-Orleans" were but famous posting-houses on a great highway, with Alicante or

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Hong Kong a turn or two to the left; and Bradford, on its little bay, was off the beaten track like an inn across the fields, yet, as if from the edge of the world, might overlook its strong men weaving the great shuttle of peaceful exchange through the warp of the seas.

Cap'n Howes, whose "owners" knew he could be trusted to pick up gold on any shore, had been off on a free roving commission to Europe and the East. He had made for Germany, traded back and forth between Australia and Ceylon before taking a cargo for home, and then had stopped in the Bight of Biafra for a bit of gold-dust and ivory.

"How about rum for Ireland this voyage, James?" asked Edward Dillingham.

"Dropped a few casksoverboard as I ran down by. Those Irishmen can beat the coastguards any day, and they don't get salt in their grog, either. But I come down with African fever at Prince's Island, Mercy, and wished I'd had you to sail me home."

"There, there, mother, don't blush," said

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Edward. "And here's Beriah navigating for a good landfall on that 'lection cake. He don't need any Maury chart to make port on the sweets."

"Mercy herself is the port for all our sailor hearts," said Cap'n Elkanah.

And as the talk swept away again to the records of new clipper ships and port rules at Calcutta, he turned back to his chat of old days with Grandmother Dillingham.

When the guests had withdrawn to the west room, and Mercy was helping the little Irish maid, to whom she was teaching the precise ways of an inherited housewifery, to "clear away," there was a mighty knocking at the back door, and Scotto Clark, with Rachel demurely following, came flying in.

"Now then, Aunt Mercy, give me a hand at that dish-towel, for I'm off to-morrow for the end of nowhere, and Heaven knows when I'll be seeing gilt china again."

Rachel nodded smilingly to Mercy, and went on into the front room, while Scotto snatched a towel from the passive Molly Connelly, who

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stood agape at so much masculine splendor, and set to work.

"But, Scotto, I thought you were not going to Hamburg for a month," said Mercy, as she tied on an apron and began to manipulate the dishes in their steaming suds.

"A letter just in from father says I leave this day week, and I've got to pick up my dunnage and get orders. Heigho, Aunt Mercy!" He gave a perilous flourish with a latticed cake-tray, which she watched with apprehension. "I'm off for the 'Bay of Biscay-O,' 'and my name was Robert Kidd when I sailed, when I sailed.'" With the chant he whirled about the table and drank an imaginary health from a compote-dish which had been standing decorously on the top shelf of the dresser. "And I'll make my fortune-O, and here's to

'The sweet little cherub that sits up aloft
To keep watch for the life of poor Jack.'"

"What ails you, Scot? You're as wild as a cat in a thunderstorm."

"What's the odds so long as you're happy?" sang Scotto, with a final whirl, as he came to

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anchor at her side. "Aunt Mercy, this is a great day. Rachel has said yes."

"Rachel?"

"Yes, my little Cousin Ray." Molly had gone into the outer kitchen to wash pans, and he spoke in a low, moved tone. "Oh, I know I'm not fit to touch the hem of that shiny dress of hers. She's like a piece of your gilt-and-white. She'd break with rough handling. But you'll see. I'll deserve her yet."

"No, she won't break. But be careful. A man would have to work hard to deserve Rachel."

"I know, — nobody better. I've loved her, Aunt Mercy, ever since we kids used to play house and I was always the bad un. But I'll be good now, you'll see. And she's the only girl in the world, the only one."

The boy believed what he said; other girls were as if they had never been.

Mercy Dillingham gave a quick little sigh that might have held a moth wing of regret, and smiled rather sadly as she followed a subdued and manly Scotto across the hall into the west room.

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Rachel had whispered to her mother that he must be going next day ; and when the young man came in, he went to his grandfather, who was just turning away from paying some old-fashioned compliment to Rosilla Howes, and told him of his departure.

“ And give me your blessing, sir,” he added in a low tone. “ Rachel says she ’ll marry me some day.”

The old man started ; but the discipline of his good-breeding checked whatever emotion he may have felt.

“ Later, my boy, later,” was all he said. “ Time enough for all that.”

Scotto’s seriousness was soon gone. A keen sense of the incongruous burlesqued the world he saw ; and he never looked upon decorous age that he was not seized with an impish desire to send it topsy-turvy back to youth.

“ Gran’ther,” he had said suddenly one summer, when their relative stature was as a mullein to an oak, “ why don’t you roll hoop ? ”

“ For no reason under the sun, my boy, except that my old legs are too stiff to follow it.”

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“Would you like to?”

“Nothing better.”

Whereupon Master Scotto had his first inkling that grown-ups not infrequently are sick for play. He was a pet of his elders. “Never was such a ‘trainer,’” said they. And because he “trained” with them, to the ignoring of surface distinctions, they drank of the cup of his youth, and were young again. To-night the joy at his heart came bubbling over, and his magnetic high spirits soon broke the smooth surface of the high tea into clamorous little waves of fun. With a joke and a story for some quiet-voiced woman or a bluff old captain, he set them all going to the top of their bent; and in the midst of the roil, he turned to Cap’n Beriah Pratt, who was known to have an agile toe when he chose to exercise it.

“Now, Cap’n, now for a high-go,” cried Scot. “Let’s see you pat Juba. Come, come, hit it up, Beriah, hit it up.”

Cap’n Pratt, who was a fat, florid little man, jumped up and made a low bow to the applauding company, and, starting off on a heavy

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double-shuffle, beat his thighs and clapped his hands to the strenuous rhythm his feet were marking. Scotto clapped in sympathy until his hands smarted, and his throat ached with contending laughter and comment designed to egg on Cap'n Pratt. Higher and higher the little man bounded ; like castanets heel and toe beat out the silent tune. The captains, who had all had turns at such "fandangoes" when they were in the fo'c's'le, were hoarse with encouraging shouts.

"Higher, there, higher," cried Cap'n 'Bial Harding, whose solemnity was a matter more of Roman nose and an agonizing black satin stock than of nature. "There you hit it up to time," he chanted, and sprang to his feet to fall in with Scot's clapping, and thumped his ponderous bluchers up and down to the rhythm. The duration of such a dance was measured by the wind of the performers, but finally all three came to the end of their breath ; and with a final half-turn and swoop that fetched his elbows up like a sprinter's and blew his coat tails straight out, Cap'n

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Beriah sank into his chair amid cheers and feminine squeaks of admiration.

Then there were tales of old days before the mast, and the women chimed in with reminiscences of the nights they had danced through in the assembly hall before it was metamorphosed into a chapel. But it did not take Scot long to recover sufficient breath to blow the flame of gayety again. He had spied on the lower shelf of a what-not a fine old accordion, such as most sailormen in those days knew how to play. In a moment he was up and drawing such merry jigs from it as set toes tingling to be off to the familiar tunes.

“Now, gentlemen, choose your partners,” he chanted to the lilt of an old contra-dance. “Cap’n Beriah, you take Mehitable. Joshu-a, don’t you see Bethiah? Clanrick, Clanrick, balance Rhoda. *Off* you go, and back again.”

He was a very splendid person as he stood there against a background of landscape paper dim as old tapestries. His foppish dress lent picturesqueness to the tall swaying figure: pale gray trousers were strapped down over

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the polished slippers — “never permit the sanctity of the drawing-room to be violated by a boot,” read his “Etiquette for Gentlemen”; the blue coat was tightly girded to his slender waist, the rolling collar disclosing glories of flowered waistcoat, fine tucked shirt, and jewelled pin. In repose his face might lack strength, whatever cheating dignity the portentous stock should give; but with dark curly head flung back, brown eyes flashing and white teeth gleaming with the fun, the deeply cleft chin and full lips and his lithe grace only accentuated the beauty of his youth.

Rachel, as she watched him from her corner, felt her heart wrung as a mother’s might have been with her darling’s short perfect joy. “God help me to keep him glad,” she thought over and over again. “God give me strength,” she prayed. “He is a good child, a good, good child. I must always be sure of that.”

His “dove of peace” he had once called her; and her heart was indeed like a brooding dove’s, not free from the apprehension of

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mischance, but gathering all into the protecting circle of her love. And she, too, bloomed in all the loveliness of youth, as the light from the old sconces above her brought out rich tints in the hair which was only mouse-colored in shadow, with her gray draperies sweeping around her, and the foam of exquisite embroideries disclosing her white throat and wrists. Yet the curved mouth was shut tight with her resolution to be strong — for two, if need were — and her hazel eyes were dark with emotion.

She turned quickly to the hall at a knock which was drowned for the others in the hubbub of their own making; and as the outer door opened, she stepped out as if to welcome the tall, blue-eyed man who was crossing the threshold. Afterward she remembered the silver radiance of the stars framed in the doorway.

“Rachel,” he cried. “Rachel, don’t you know me?”

“Why, John Dillingham,” she said slowly. “You have come.”

“Yes, Ray.” He took her hands. “Where’s

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mother?" he asked, as he looked past her into the lighted room. "What's all this skylarking?"

"A tea —"

But his mother was in his arms, and Cap'n Edward looked his greeting over her shoulder. The dancers stopped on the moment, Scot with the accordion half drawn, Cap'n Beriah with coat tails spread to a bow, Mehitable Foster half sunk in a languishing curtsy, Cap'n Elkanah and Madame Desire with clasped hands, as they had advanced between the opposing lines. Then the spell was broken as if at the touch of the conquering prince.

"It's John," they cried. "Welcome home, welcome home, boy."

"How are you, John?" said Scotto when they met, — two men who looked fit for the winning of Ultima Thule. "You're home as I'm off."

"Good-bye, everybody," he called a moment later, as he drew Rachel through an opposite door. "Good-bye, old fellow. Good-bye, again. I start for the city first tide."



IV

MRS. ZELLAPHINE MAYO was a fit exponent of the result to be looked for in a mixture of French and Puritan blood, and the one element drove her on to rash deeds of chivalry, whose fruition was blasted by the chill of her critic mind. She helped with one hand and injured with the other; and a sharp tongue defeated the impulse of her ministering heart. She was the most loved and hated woman in Bradford, and not infrequently did she cause her neighbors to achieve the emotion of synchronous hate and love. For no one

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could forget her instant kindness in grief or disaster, yet must they have an eye to the distorted report of such service which her sick nerves, broken by the strain, were sure to set in motion. In illness, especially, she was an angel of mercy ; but for months afterward sly rumors would creep back to the afflicted family, — hints of slovenly or mean living, allusions to depths not as fair as the exterior of that particular household. She had a fine histrionic gift of indicating destruction while she sang of peace and love.

“ You watch Zellaphine Mayo’s eyes when she’s at a yarn,” said Cap’n Pratt. “ If they don’t agree with what her tongue’s saying, look out for reefs.”

Like the lady of the story, she might be a devil to face, though an angel to follow — especially if the journey were long : for lips ugly with the venom of exhaustion were sure to obscure the memory of gracious contours.

René Rousseau had been a youth all delight and charm, and had gone out to conquer the seas that engulfed him with the gayety of a

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troubadour who plays pitch and toss with his sword and trolls a bold stave as he rides forth to war. But his young wife, broken, perhaps, by the misery of her loss, developed into a shrew; and while Zellaphine, their daughter, was as even a mixture of the two as if measured by a pint pot, — so much good red wine to an equal quantity of gall, — her child, Polly, harked back to René's bright winsomeness; and perhaps, too, the years were yet to disclose a core of English strength within that glowing rind. However that might be, from a school madcap, who held teachers and pupils in her silken leash, she was coming to her heritage of charm.

Every lad in the village had had his season of loving Polly. In the sad winter, three years back, when it was believed that Bela Mayo would never again make port, — the ship was months overdue, for he had put out from the African Coast with a crew disabled with fever, — and Polly's vivacity was softened by the alluring mist of sorrow, not a man of the young sailors then at home but would have married

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her out of hand and set sail next tide on the waters of illimitable bliss. But, after the manner of the born coquette, Polly smiled on all, and loved not a mother's son of them. Love could not be such a serious matter, reasoned she, when a man languished at a glance, and next season married him an excellent wife and set about the business of living. Perhaps she had wavered in the game when it came to Scotto Clark, who, as he added art to the instinct of conquest, was more than her match. He could no more resist the lure of a pretty face than a huntsman could forego riding for the brush. But Polly was no fool; she knew gallop from trot, and when the chase pressed, she had her leafy coverts. The bitterness of her exclamation on that day when she and Rachel went a-Maying might have revealed a tiny wound to peering eyes; but a stitch or two of her deft fingers, skilled in the tricks of such surgery, would make her heart-whole once more, and ready for another game.

On a warm afternoon in June she sat in her shaded parlor, stitching, not hearts, but

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the fine undersleeves she had promised Rachel Sears. She had never been able to bring her curly mop into the precise line of the moment's fashion; but the length of it was brushed smoothly enough into a coil at the back of her small head, where dark tendrils tipped with gold strayed down to her white neck. Pretty and piquant and charming were, perforce, the adjectives for each member of Polly's little body; and perhaps she had never looked more wholly desirable than on this June afternoon, as she sat there with her little feet in their bronzed slippers crossed on a footstool, her little waist girdled by a ribbon to make all neat with her pink-flowered Dacca muslin, her little hands busy with their pretty work: yet the full line of downcast eyelids, and brows slanting a shade upward at the temples, belied the demureness of her pose.

John Dillingham, at any rate, found the picture not unpleasing, as he stretched his six-feet-two of manhood on the East-Indian wicker chair by the window, where a blossoming syringa that matched the althea bush beyond

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the straight path to the gate was swaying the censers of its heavy perfume. His linen suit gave him the air of one who has learned in the Orient the trick of circumventing heat, and his big brown hands wielded a fan painted with pagodas and silken ladies leering from thin slits of porcelain faces. His blue eyes, which had the keenness of those that watch at sea, were softened to their present occupation of following Polly's needle weaving her mysterious feminine will. But with the scene set for sentimental dallying, they talked of Rachel Sears.

"There is nobody like her ; there is nobody good enough for her," Polly was declaring in her sweet drawl that was as soft as the touch of a kitten's ear.

"Scot's a good fellow," said John stoutly.

"Oh, yes. He's good-hearted. Perhaps he only needs ballast. But Rachel must n't be ballast."

"No, not ballast."

"And, John, does Rachel really love him?" Polly's needle stopped its weaving. She lifted

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the cover of the gold-lacquered table at her elbow as one who should find the answer to her quest among its ivory treasures. Then she folded the half-finished sleeve, laid it carefully in the rose-silk pouch beneath the table, and turned to John as if, after all, one must go to a man for reasons. "You see, she has mothered every one since she was a baby, — her own mother, her grandfather, the animals, the birds, — perhaps now she's just mothering Scot. He needs a mother." She gave a quick nod, and looked at John with a funny tight slant to her curved lips.

"They must work it out themselves, I suppose," said John slowly, as he began to turn the leaves of "The Floral Year" lying on the table beside him. "Pretty pictures," he commented absently. "Do you really like this stuff?" he asked, as he opened the fat volume that balanced the other corner. "Now listen to this." He began to read in a sepulchral tone: —

"And many wise in many words should answer, what is
beauty?"

Who shall separate the hues that flicker on a dying dolphin?"

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Oh, Lord," groaned John. "And here's another: —

'Or set in rank the wandering shades about a watered silk?' Give me something easy, — broiling dolphin steak or running down a cachalot," he ended.

"Well, I don't know," conceded Polly. "You see, I don't read much. But Miss Asenath Snow thinks it's very elevating, and we're to have Tupper for the subject at the next Lyceum."

"I'd rather hear you sing 'The Messenger Bird' or 'Come to the Sunset Tree' than have Miss Asenath Tupper all day, — rather by a long chalk." He laughed out in a good boyish shout, and went across to the alcove where Polly's seraphine stood, to look over her music. "Here's 'The Lovely May,'" he said. "Let's have a verse or two of that."

"The Lovely May" was one of those songs where one was not afraid to repeat a dominant adjective as many times as need be to fetch the rhythm around to the point of departure, and in a moment they were off in the mincing measures.

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“ ‘ Flowerets bloom, and insects play
In the lovely, lovely May,’ ” —

trilled Polly, and John boomed in on the chorus : —

“ ‘ Ever charming, ever gay !
Charming, charming, charming, charming, charming,
lovely May.’ ”

They went on to —

“ Time never lingers
Moves never slow ” ; —

and another where there were many “ la-la-las ” and “ tra-la-las,” with an emphasis of rhythm and economy of word ; and John proceeded in a dogged monotone, “ La-la-la,” while she doubled and was back again on a repeat. Polly was playing a rousing accompaniment to his lusty baritone in “ The True Yankee Sailor,” when Mrs. Zellaphine, her face purple with heat, came in and dropped into Polly’s sewing-chair.

“ It’s Mary Tilt’s own fault,” she gasped.

“ Poor mother, it’s hot, isn’t it ? ” cooed Polly’s soft voice.

She untied the ribbons of the flat sun-hat,

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rolled and pinned them neatly, and brought the lace cappee, which was Mrs. Zellaphine's tribute to matronhood. Her staid contemporaries regarded the cappee as proof of the ineradicable frivolity of French blood. Her dark hair suggested Polly's crinkle; but the labor of forty years had subdued it to a scarcely perceptible wave, and she brushed it down low over her cheeks and up again over the ears in a fashion that gave her the appearance of an alert and kindly spaniel.

"It's Mary Tilt's own fault," she repeated. She was very warm, and her discomfort took its toll of Mary Tilt's delinquencies. "I'd like to see any one thrive on that catlap she lives on. She'd rather sew than eat. She's sat up till all hours finishing Tamson Crocker's wedding clo'es. I told her how 't would be. And Tamson better 've started her clo'es in time, and not take it out of poor little Mary Tilt. I've talked, and talked, and I'd better 've held my tongue."

"I guess that calf's-foot jelly will bring Mary 'round all right," offered Polly.

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“What’s a mess o’ calf’s-foot jelly!” snorted Zellaphine. “She needs to eat three square meals a day, and not lift a finger to sew, and sleep ten hours in the twenty-four. Sometimes seems ’s if she’s just perverse. She isn’t so poor as all that comes to, and she don’t eat enough to keep a day-old kitten alive.”

Mrs. Zellaphine, who was proud of her cookery, and liked nothing better than stuffing friend or foe to the limit of his capacity, usually returned to her grievance that few men and no women ate enough for a kitten.

“Where to now, John?” she asked, as John picked up his sun-helmet and stood to say good-bye. She had acknowledged his presence when she entered only by a curt nod.

“To Cap’n Pratt’s. Josiah Seabury’s down with typhoid, and I want Freeman to go second mate with me.”

“Long voyage this time?”

“No. Down to ‘New-Orleans’ for cargo, and then over to Antwerp. The *Sally* ought to be a fast sailer. I’ve been watching her

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finishings this six weeks at Newburyport, and she's the right build. Then I want to make another China voyage."

The interval had been sufficient for Zellaphine to regain something of her normal temperature, and Mary Tilt's trespass subsided with the mercury. Brimming with good-will, she rose to bid the boy good-bye.

"One voyage at a time, John," said she, patting him affectionately **on** the shoulder, "but good luck in all."

Polly went with him into the front entry.

"I may not see you again, good little friend," said he. Cap'n Elkanah himself could not have bent over her hand in more courtly fashion.

"Oh," said Polly, "not again? Well, fair sailing, John."

"And Polly — be good to Rachel," said he, turning back quickly.

"Yes, I'll be good to Rachel."

But she shook her head sadly as she watched him swinging down the deutzia path.



V

ASENATH SNOW lived in a square white house that marked the exact centre of the town. One great chimney gave vent to her cavernous fireplaces; kitchen and butteries and milk-room succeeded one another in the outhouses that stretched to the barn. On a day in May apple and peach orchards made her a blossomy bower, and, more practically, as became her thrifty spinsterhood, offered her in autumn the choicest brands of fruit. A tall arbor-vitæ hedge sheltered this isle of maiden plenty from the traffic that floated gently up

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and down to the next turn of the stage-road where stood the post-office and general store presided over by her uncle, General Philander Paine.

Like Cap'n Elkanah, Philander Paine had served the state as well as the sea, and in his old age was turning an honest penny in his little shop which was also a clubroom for all the old sea-dogs in town. Every morning they might be seen strolling down the village street toward Philander's. One might stop by the way, perhaps, to visit a household that had been established since he last made port, where the first little toddler was just tall enough to hold by a horny forefinger and stagger down to the gate with his new friend, who was sure to have sugar-plums in a capacious pocket. Or another visited the low-eaved house whence the wife and mother had gone for the last time to sleep among the willows and poplars in the burying-ground on the hill, all her simple history engraved on the slate stone above her: "During a long life she performed her duties with fidelity and zeal, and died in the

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triumphs of Christian faith and resignation."

But whatever the digression the walk was sure to end at General Philander's; and not a day passed that three or four captains did not meet in the little back room to exchange gossip of the land and sea. Now and then a small boy stole in to listen to the stories that taught him more geography than a dull schoolbook could have done in a month, and then went home to pore over grandfather's "English Pilot," where the seas were charted like jewelled stars, and lands of romance lay alluringly behind sinuous coast-lines. If you had mastered the trick of the long "esses" in the black letterpress, you could learn how to sail a ship in and out of the Bights of Benin and Biafra, and you could supply your own cannibals lurking behind "the three tall trees" if you had made a good landfall off the Cameroons. You generally preferred the Tooth Coast to a Greenland voyage, although you would like to see for yourself if the penguin "had a white spot under one of their eyes, which nature has ordered to be

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under the right eye for extraordinary remarks," as was observed by one Captain Henry Southwood in the year 1715.

Every Bradford boy dreamed of mountainous seas, and calms when strange monsters nosed up from their oozy lairs, and of the great rollers that swept down the world to break on the rim of some rocky southern island. And he meant to begin with a record voyage around the Horn, and he hoped another war would furnish the stuff on which to prove his prowess, wherein, alas, he was not to be disappointed. It was civil war when Yankee captains were again running blockades, although, before then, John Dillingham, in a slack year, shipped men instead of merchandise, — Frenchmen, as it happened, to be shot down before Russian redoubts in the Crimea. But here in the little shop was a lesson worth more than the great chapter of adventure for a boy's learning: for no toil was rated mean in Bradford; and a commander or merchant or statesman turned quite simply to farming or shop-keeping when his sons were old enough

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to follow the sea. The village cobbler and blacksmith were as good as the best, and one had a son in the Russia trade, and the other a boy who was a great merchant at "Melbun." Then the hilltop was reached at forty, and the downward path, whether leisurely or precipitous, a man liked best to tread out at home.

The Paines, father and son and brother, had belonged to the unbroken aristocracy of the sea since the first ventures had gone back to the Old World. Philander had been a deep-water captain before he had succeeded General Clark in the militia; and he had his taste of real war by more than one thrilling escape from British frigates in 1812. The small boys liked no story better than that of Philander's capturing a prize crew on his own brig and sailing them into Baltimore. He had been nosing his way out to sea when a frigate cut across his path and he saw that the first throw in the game had fallen to the Britisher. He sent his crew below, and when the boarding-officer asked his strength, pointed to

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the man and boy on deck. "You see," said Cap'n Philander, and a guard of three or four was thought sufficient for such a light-manned boat. But that evening a smart little breeze came zipping along, and Philander called up his crew before you could say "Jack Robinson," and raced into Baltimore to hand over his guard to the American authorities.

Asenath Snow's trig house at the turn of the road—her mother was sister to General Philander—was stored with treasures which the Paines had brought from many lands; and as her father had been the lawyer of Bradford and the neighboring villages, his library was rich in old leather-bound books—of the law? Yes: but more beloved were the Greek poets and the English essayists and novelists. Asenath's most vivid picture of him was as he sat of a winter evening in his "snuggery," his great winged chair drawn up to the blazing hearth, reading again and again Fielding or Hazlitt, or the Waverley novels as they came over the sea. In summer he turned more

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to the Greeks ; and as a small girl her delight had been to hear him chant the ringing choruses of Euripides or the stately rhythm of Homer's verse. He himself, with his mutton-chop whisker and fine head, looked to be both Britisher and Greek. As a fact, he had come over from Yorkshire when a lad, a later pilgrim from Old England than other Bradfordites, but of the same tradition and blood.

Asenath lived in the old house with Bridget, sister to Mrs. Dillingham's Molly Connelly, whose father lived in a neat house across the fields and "farmed it" for Asenath and other lone women of the town. She was an "old maid" by Bradford arithmetic ; but thirty-five years had not dimmed her brown hair and pink cheeks ; and when every one dressed with a Quaker demureness, she was not old because she wore softly flowing gray silks, and prim berthas, and bonnets in whose flower-wreathed depths her face looked as smoothly fresh as Polly Mayo's own.

Asenath had declined from the fine old literature which was her father's delight to

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the Early Victorian story-tellers and bards who set a less heroic pace. Anne C. Lynch and Martin Tupper were the fashion ; and in the Lyceum, which had been the Female Reading Society of their mothers, Bradford women were smearing their strong good sense and humorous appreciation of realities with the modern veneer. They read largely the literature commended in the "Lady's Book," to which every household with any pretension to elegance subscribed ; and, by his own showing, Mr. Godey offered no mean pabulum for the female mind. "The pages of the 'Lady's Book,' " announced his prospectus, "will be a shrine for the offerings of those who wish to promote the mental, moral, and religious improvement of woman. For female genius it is the appropriate sphere. It will contain a new and elegant engraving in *every number* — also music and patterns for ladies' muslin work and other embellishments." Asenath and Rachel's mother, Caroline Sears, were partners in disseminating such benefits in Bradford. No women in the town were busier :

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they chose subjects for the Lyceum, they taught in the Sunday-school, they organized a class for young girls who should discuss moral problems as bearing on their personal experience, — “character meetings,” these came to be called, — and sufficient frivolity in the way of high teas and picnics and sketching classes baited the trap of intellectual advancement.

On a summer morning the two were hatching a new project in the cosey sitting-room which Asenath liked to call her boudoir, although there no feminine kickshaws made the disarray beloved of women’s hearts. The solid mahogany desk with the leaded-glass cupboard was in the precise order that betokens little use ; quill pen and sand box and heavy old inkwell made a methodical group on its open leaf — many a will and deed of transfer had Lawyer Snow turned out with those implements. Law books had been banished to the garret; and bound copies of “Godey” and splendid gilt “Annuals” held their places on the shelves cheek by jowl with Smollett and stubby brown

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volumes of the "Spectator." Asenath's little flowered sewing-table, which her mother had painted as exquisitely as French fingers could have done it, stood in a sunny corner, where, in winter, the English ivy branched out to wreath the room with its glossy green. A snuggerly it might still be named, but a snuggerly of the same delicate ordering that found expression in Asenath's dress and her smoothly banded hair.

A pile of books was on the floor by the card-table.

"The beginning of the Bradford Lending Library," said Caroline. "Perhaps it will become as famous as the Boston Mercantile Library."

"What we must do," responded Asenath promptly,—she dealt in methods and left dreams to whom they should concern,— "what we must do is to interest the girls. We will form a society, each member to pledge her share of two dollars or an equivalent in books, and we must have entertainments and a fair."

"We could hold it in our orchard in Au-

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gust," said Caroline, who always had an eye for the picturesque, "and the girls shall be dressed as nymphs. My little class in conchology will, I am sure, make some pretty shell-work of their specimens, and I have just been teaching a few children to make moss pictures and mottoes which should have a ready sale."

"No doubt we shall be able to furnish the tables," said Asenath, with a reserve which seemed to indicate that she knew a thing or two beyond shells or moss.

The two were perfectly mated in their innocent plottings for the raising of Bradford's intellectual level. Caroline caught the breeze of any new idea with a sure instinct of response, and tinkled out her fancies to the practical mind of Asenath, who had a genius for appropriating imaginative projects and turning them loose again fashioned for use. A spirit less gentle than Caroline's would have craved its meed of rightful praise; but that soft heart held no spark of envy, and she dreamed only of her beloved village as the home of all the arts. She knew that Asenath would sift out the tares of the

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chimerical with a ruthless turn of her capable hand, which would sow only the seed that should produce fruit; and, thinking of Bradford rather than of Caroline Sears, she was content. This lending library had been her fond dream for many a year, but only this summer had Asenath regarded it as feasible.

The young minister, who had succeeded Doctor Thompson, had found the parsonage overlarge for his modest household, and a room to the left of the front door had been unfurnished. Asenath saw that this would make an ideal library room, for its easy accessibility would encourage the villagers to pay a small fee to drink at the fount of knowledge. They had yet to broach this plan to the minister, but Miss Asenath made sure of managing him somehow; and it was as if James Bristed had unwittingly invited their proposal by giving over to them for the use of the Lyceum or the Sunday-school his sister's little library which she had left behind when she went out to Australia after her marriage. The Bristeds were a bookish family, where the girls studied

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with their brothers, and might have entered college with them and been graduated, for that matter; and Alice Bristed's cast-off library was choicer than many a girl's of her day might have been. The two conspirators had been looking over her books that morning.

"It is well to have some serious volumes," said Asenath. "We shall have enough 'Annuals' and story-books."

"I'm glad we have these Miss Edgeworth's," said Caroline. "And here's Mrs. Opie."

"Potted sprats?" offered Asenath slyly.

Caroline blushed and laughed, for Cap'n Elkanah was wont to quote that immortal incident as a warning for her too accommodating will.

"James Bristed is a wide-awake young man," digressed Asenath, "and we ought to see some new doings in the parish."

"Like enough he'll make us see things as we ought," conceded Caroline.

"He's been to the Holy Land, and has some fine charts for the Sunday-school. Those

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children might's well be getting a little history and geography with their religion. I must say I prefer facts to precepts myself."

"Still, old Doctor Thompson taught us a good many things we can't afford to forget," said Caroline, whose heart turned to the past as fondly as her imagination scurried into the future. "And I'm not sure but the chart of his holy living is about as fine a thing as we're likely to see."

At eleven o'clock, when they had sketched in the scheme of their library, and were prepared for an advance upon the town, there was a loud knocking at the side door and then the stump of a resolute step across the middle room.

"What you two up to now?" called General Philander. "Something to empty our pockets, I'll be bound. What's to pay, Asenath?"

"Two dollars to the Bradford Lending Library, uncle," said Asenath promptly. "And you as good give it now as later. 'General Philander Paine,' top line, and if you start

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out with two dollars, Cap'n Dillingham and Beriah Pratt won't give less."

"You've missed your job, 'Senath. You ought to ha' been a pirate and cruised the Spanish Main. I never sail into your waters that I don't get a shot across my bows."

He beamed down upon the two women like the argent moon, and produced the cash from a flat wallet embellished with a portrait of Napoleon.

"Asenath does know how to get the money," said Caroline, rather wistfully.

"None better, Mrs. Caroline. But I suspect you of being a master hand at plots."

"Oh, General Paine," deprecated Caroline.

Then she made her good-byes, and in a flutter of laughter and veils and peña scarfs floated off to her conchology class.

"She don't seem much put about by this nonsense between Rachel and Scot Clark," growled Philander.

"I don't know what she can do," said Asenath. "I suppose they've got to take

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each other for better or worse like other married folks.”

“Worse, worse, worse, I’ll be bound. He ain’t fit to tie her shoe. Here to-day, and there to-morrow, that’s Scot Clark, and always will be. Even Rachel Sears can’t change a man’s nature.”

“Well, if he continues to follow the sea, that will give him enough wandering,” returned Asenath, who always saw a way out.

“There are n’t miles enough in the ocean to keep that feller going. He ought to be King of the Indies, and a mutiny on hand every other day to keep him busy. And when his mind is n’t occupied with laudable enterprise, he’s bound for mischief. I know him. Rachel’d be chart and compass for most men ; but I doubt me if she can steer Scotto Clark through the strip o’ water ahead of ’em.”

“What she sets her hand to she won’t flinch from,” said Asenath. “And she’s known him egg and bird, they being like brother and sister, ever since he came here in roundabouts.”

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“Yes, and poured my jug of ‘New-Orleans’ into the meal-bin.”

“That was a great to-do. The young man got his first good thrashing that day, and you gave it to him.”

“Pity he had n’t had more.” The old man chuckled himself into good humor, and then sobered. “Those good women have daring souls, ‘Senath. They may be doing the Lord’s work when they risk shipwreck to save us men. But I question whether a mother’s son of us is worth it.”



VI

THE Clark farmyard brimmed with the glory of the late summer day like a yokel's tankard filled with golden wine, and the air was heavy with the warm scent of hay and munching cattle. Silent birds scurried overhead straight to their waiting nests ; and the barn swallows swooped low in saucy defiance of Jehosaphat, who sat bolt upright in the precise middle of the yard and blinked oblique yellow eyes at them. It was Jehosaphat and his offspring that formed the basis of enmity between Azubah and little Mike

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Connelly, and the clash of battle renewed rang above the clatter of ducks and the reminding voices of the sheep at the barnyard gate. The ducks were at their trick of assuring Mike that that night, at any rate, he had forgotten to give them their supper.

"Them ducks do beat all," he had said to his grandfather, Felix, who, milking over, was standing at ease in the barn door, hands in pockets, looking at nothing. "They fooled me once ; an' now they chuck down their feed, an' start in hollerin' 's if they had n't et for a week."

He stooped to give Jehosaphat's furry chin a deft upstroke.

"Here, you Mike," shrilled Azubah from the kitchen. "You be about feedin' them sheep, an' then set yourself to clearin' out cats. I won't have 'em multiplyin' an' carousin' in that barn another day."

Azubah had declared a war of extermination on the barn cats ; yet, though the animal itself was abomination to her, the name of the cat was continually in her mouth. She swore

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by great Pakht though she knew it not. Did cake fall or china smash, she invoked the cat's hind foot or the kitten's tail, and the cat was her unfailing barometer. The Clark cats knew their duty: as if it were precious lore handed down through the generations and with the air of detachment characteristic of the race, they seemed to relieve one another in the game of baiting Azubah. "Look at that Tom, look at him," she would cry on a doubtful wash-day when she would have conjured the sun to shine. There sat Jehosaphat on the barn door run, and washed his face over and around and about, pausing now and then as if to leer at Azubah's kitchen window with a "Now, then, old girl, how about rain!" Or a Maltee, with tail aloft stiff as a button-hook, capered sideways across the yard: "a gale o' wind" in that tail, any old salt could have told you; and Azubah made sure it would blow up a storm. Not a velvet paw dared cross the house threshold; but three generations were growing fat in the sanctuary of the barn, and she was as determined to rout out all but the nec-

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essary mouser as was little Mike to keep his pets.

"I told you I wuz tryin' to get homes for 'em," he threw back at her from the safe distance of the middle yard. And Jehosaphat gave paw as if to seal a pact, offensive and defensive, against the common enemy of boys and cats. "Cap'n Paine thinks he'd like Merinda, an' Miss Asenath —"

"It takes you a long time to go an hour, Mike Connelly, when you don't want to make port. If your will to get rid o' them cats had been as strong as a kitten's forefinger, there'd be just one cat by now."

"Cap'n Clark says I can keep —"

"What's that you're going to keep, Mike?" called Cap'n Elkanah's rich leisurely tone from the side porch, where he sat in the warm glow of the west and waited for Rachel to join him for their evening walk.

"The cats, please, sir. Lydia an' Merinda's splendid mousers, an' Jehosaphat kinder keeps 'em up to their work. Then there's the black kitten Miss Rachel cosseted last winter."

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“How about them two new families o’ kittens?” clanged Azubah from her window. “Your wits shine like a cat’s eye under the bed when you’re tryin’ to git your own way.”

With a thought to the impatient sheep, Mike picked up his basin of corn.

“Well, Mike, perhaps two families of kittens are more than we need,” interposed the peacemaker. “Suppose you keep one kitten from each lot, as Jehosaphat’s growing into years and may be losing his nose for a mouse. And I think you better let Cap’n Paine have Merinda.”

“Yes, sir,” grinned Mike, at what was virtual victory. He went off trolling —

“‘Away, haul away,
Haul away, Josey.’”

For he, too, meant to go to sea, and his dazzling ambition was to be chanty-man and lead the choruses for his mates.

Azubah had her opinion of pert boys and soft-hearted old gentlemen. “We’ll be havin’ a cat farm next news,” she snorted. But it would be something to see six kittens the less

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daring the leap from barn-sill to yard. She shied an apple at Jehosaphat, who rose slowly and ostentatiously sniffed as at alien tribute ; and then she went back to her kitchen to sprinkle clothes for to-morrow's ironing.

Cap'n Elkanah, with the help of old Felix and his son and little Mike, had made the most of his fifty acres that stretched from lane to beach. Flowers bloomed in the small square garden under the dining-room windows, where the formal beds and walks, the encircling hedges and the balustrade and great stone vase overflowing with delicate greenery, gave it the secret look of some old pleasaunce ; and in the sunny corner where Cap'n Elkanah had set a French garden bench against the roses, it would not have been difficult to picture the merry gentlefolk of Watteau coquetting there with youth and time. Flowers, again, bordered the large low-lying garden to the east of the house where vegetables grew ; cows were pastured in the brook meadow ; Mike's sheep grazed a little stony upland ; corn-fields stretched beyond the barnyard ; meadows of

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waving grasses encircled all. And farther yet was the pine wood where the children used to play, and Wehasset Pond, the lair of pirates, and then the dunes gay with silver beach-grass and lupin. And on the edge of the low cliffs that overlooked the bay were Cap'n Elkanah's salt-works, which, when the great troughs set up on piles were capped with their pitch roofs, looked not unlike some outlandish Polynesian village. Salt-making had been a profitable business in the old days before the Revolution when salt was not imported; and Cap'n Elkanah still made it the chief concern of his day from the early spring, when he set the little windmills at their task of pumping seawater into the tanks, until he battened down the roofs in the autumn.

On a fair summer evening, he and Rachel were apt to take the field path down to the shore, — to look at the works, he professed, and compute how big a job of evaporation the sun had accomplished that day. But more they went for pure pleasure of the sweet earth and of their own company. Wild rose and

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honeysuckle, elderberry and white clethra bloomed there in the season, the air was tonic with bayberry and pine and the sharp tang of the salt, and the old man and girl were like lover and lass in the close bonds of their affection. She was as proud of his beautiful age as he of her youth ; and as they walked down the path in the glow of the setting sun, he bent a little from the great stature of his early manhood, but there was boyish vigor in his ruddy face, keen blue eyes, and thatch of white hair. She had the corresponding height of woman, her hair was touched to an unexpected red by the splendor of the west and the faint color in her white skin was picked out by the roses tucked under the brim of her hat. He ~~was~~ rallying her on the extravagance of wearing her new mantilla, and she retorted that her best must always be for him. "Gran'ther's comfort-child," said he, as he drew her hand through his strong old arm. And again, like lovers, they walked on through the scents and sounds of the summer evening.

They reached the dunes as the sun dropped

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below the horizon. The tide was dead low, and glistening sand flats stretched out to the faint line of foam, where blue water broke on the "great bar." The white cliffs of the opposite shore loomed through the tranquil air; the sky was a royal mantle for the dying day, the floor of the bay effulgent with glowing color as of mother-o'-pearl and jacinth, chrysoprase and porphyry.

" 'They that occupy themselves in deep waters see the wonderful works of God,' " said Elkanah, as they stood on the brow of the cliff. "Many times in my youth that saying came home to me; and in my old age His works are as marvellous."

"Nothing in the world is so lovely as our little bay," said she, jealously.

"At this hour it is more like heaven than earth, — like the gate of the world where we must all come at last."

"Gran'ther, dear." She snuggled her hand into his arm.

"And death may come like a king out there. I remember in the North Sea a derelict

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bark where thirty men lay frozen corpses, and all encased in glittering ice. Those poor nameless fellows had the mausoleum of an emperor."

They were silent a moment, and he thought of death, and she, perhaps, of life.

"Life is a king who gives," said Rachel softly.

"It's giving and giving," assented Elkanah Clark, who had seen all the world and the men thereof, and death in multitudinous forms. "But, dear heart, I mistrust sometimes that you may give too much. All your life you have given — comfort, and peace, and joy. You have given to your mother and to me, and to all the sorrowful and weak. Now you should receive. Scotto —"

"Scotto gives, too," said she, quickly.

"Yes," said the old man. He turned with a sigh to look once more across the fading glory to the shore beyond. "It was on such a night as this," he said, "that the *Aphrodite* went down."

The old stories were always new to Rachel,

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for, as the years went on, he retold them, not, it seemed, out of the garrulity of age, but from a deeper insight. She had heard of the *Aphrodite* a hundred times, and was eager for the retelling.

“We were in a belt of calms,” he went on, “and when we abandoned her, leaking as she was, that thousand miles off Rio, we must row ten miles, or perhaps a hundred and ten, to strike the southeast trades. The sea was like glass, the sun just slipping out of sight. I had boarded her once more and made sure that she must soon be sinking, and we had pulled off a bit in the boats. Suddenly the men at the oars cried ‘Look, look at her!’ A breeze had caught her sails, full set, and she seemed to follow us. But her hour had come; she careened heavily, this side and then the other, and down she went as if her heart broke.”

Silently, they set about the business of covering the salt vats. By a simple mechanism, two of the roofs swung into place with the turn of a hand.

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“She had been a live thing, that *Aphrodite*,” said Rachel, as they turned homeward in the purple afterglow that made the land as magic as the sea. “Her heart broke.”



VII

THE parsonage was one of the oldest houses in town, built early in the seven-teen hundreds, when Bradford and its neighbor, the fishing-village on the sea, made one township. Cap'n Strabo Pratt had lived there, and led the opposition to the town division which the radicals in both villages sought to bring about. He held that such business was all folderol, a plan hatched by politicians to multiply offices. As it stood, Bradford was just big enough and just small enough for decent folk to live in. Fish caught by men of your

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own town were the fish for Bradfordites to eat; nor were the schooners that put out from South Bay more likely to wet their salt if manned by town councillors than by seamen who left politics to their betters. Moreover, there was nothing to prevent a fisherman from playing politics now save a proper understanding of the relative social value of fish and deep-sea cargoes. Yet Strabo bore all the earmarks of a genial democracy, and the radical leader was a patrician whose instincts upheld established order.

Parson Warren lived across the street in the old square house, where the trim walks bordered by perennials were no more precise than the alignment of his mind. Fresh from Oxford and Italy, he had come to Bradford in his fragile youth, and had grown into vigorous age under such easy harness as he found there. He wrote his two sermons a week on classic lines, and, as the years passed, became more explicit in regard to the probable future of erring Bradfordites. But all the venom of his nature went to rhetoric; and tradition carried a benignant picture of the old man, in gown

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and bands, his fine old face glowing with love and high resolve, — save them he would, — while his vigorous old arm pounded out damnation for all sinners. He dealt out red-hot doctrine, and was answered from the pews with the militant hymns of Isaac Watts.

“ Backward with humble shame we look
On our original,” —

confessed his penitents. But when the last stanza brought out the reserves of hope : —

“ The second Adam shall restore
The ruins of the first :
Hosanna to that sovereign Power
That new-creates our dust ! ” —

the fishes in the bay might have stood on their little tails with wonder at such roaring mercies. The men sang because they liked to open their mouths and make a noise, and wives and sweet-hearts had to pipe their best to carry treble when lungs inured to battling against reef-tops' l gales let out their mightiest.

The parson and Cap'n Pratt carried their public difference to the unchristian limit of a private feud. “ High Bradford ” was set off

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in aristocratic seclusion, and Strabo Pratt was not the man to weaken because he was defeated; nor could the parson's high spirit brook Strabo's ostentatious and humorous compliance with the new order. Cap'n Pratt performed his political and churchly duties: he served as selectman of the new township as he had of the old; he went to meeting twice on the Sunday, and once he was rewarded by a short triumph when Daniel V was the lesson of the day. " 'Tekel; Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting,' " rolled out the parson's sonorous voice. " 'Peres; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.' " Strabo made the little girl in mitts and coal-scuttle bonnet who sat across the aisle hop with horror at his hardly suppressed snort; and he looked defiantly at Sabrina Pratt, as who should say: "There you have it. Cut 'em up is a sure sign of the end."

Strabo would allow nothing better than an armed neutrality, until one day Love outmanœuvred him, and Joel Pratt married

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beautiful Elizabeth Warren, the light of her grandfather's eyes. Joel was a crony of Elkanah Clark's; in a hard season, when they were youngsters of twelve and fourteen, they had run away to the nearest seaport to find a berth, and had done it, too, and written back to their elder brothers who had failed: "Come up, and we will find you a job, rather than that you should be at home on expense all winter." And Joel married Elizabeth Warren and became a great merchant; and they lived in the finest of city houses, and baby fingers drew together the warring old neighbors at Bradford. And before many years the Warren house passed into alien hands, and two Pratt spinsters, daughters of Strabo, lived across the way; and they, too, followed the path of their fathers; but first, as if to wipe from the slate all traces of the old feud, they bequeathed their house to the parish for a parsonage.

When James Bristed came to Bradford, the old people said he showed more promise than any man since Parson Warren's day, although

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he told them of eternal hope by a new reading of the faith once delivered to the saints, and assured them that the Gospel would "make men holy that they may be happy." The grim tenets of Parson Warren and his successors were melting into a gentle, pious liberalism, and when men prayed for the final good that should come to them through the Lamb of God, they knew that such reward was sure. James Bristed, some thought, was but too ready to disregard the swish of reminder in the last clause of their creed which affirmed "the sanctions of a future state of retribution"; but he held that one lifetime would be too short in which to preach the great messages of his faith: that all men should come to ultimate salvation; that obedience was the rule of life; that God was the God of Love, and Jesus the great Elder Brother who wept for the sufferers on the narrow way to life everlasting.

He moved into the old Pratt house with his gentle little mother, who made no great impression on lusty, stirring Bradford. She looked as frail as the delicate old lace that capped her

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nodding white curls; and when the ladies paid their calls of ceremony, she deprecated the ill-health which prevented the return of their civility. Another scion of the house of Connelly helped her in the kitchen ; but her son's favorite dishes she prepared with her own exquisite hands: for he was the beginning and ending of her days, and in her petitions was included a prayer against the danger of idolatrous earthly affection, lest her son should usurp the place in her heart that belonged to God.

James went freely about his parish, and was gay, as far as gayety became a minister, with the young people, while he won the old with his deferential sympathy. The young men respected and liked him. " He 's the sort of sky-pilot who knows when to steer slow among the reefs, and when there's free sailing in deep water," Scotto Clark had said. The girls looked at him shyly from under their big bonnets, or sat with eyes downcast when he made his first family visitation ; but although he knew how to maintain his dignity, he was not

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above returning a furtive shaft from maiden eyes with a flash of mirth for such portentous solemnity. He had singled out no one of them for "particular attention," it was remarked ; but every mother's daughter of them knew him for a desirable young man.

To his people he presented an unruffled front, and his perplexities and vexations he was wont to take a-fishing. By a secret path through fields and woods behind the parsonage lay a pond where bass were plenty ; and on many a morning when his parishioners thought him bending over his Sunday sermons, he was out there in his boat. On such days he tucked some worn book into his pocket, — Izaak Walton, for a choice, who had recorded the eternal profit to be had from fishing, for the joy of all fishermen who should follow him ; and as he drifted with the breeze from the piney bank, he cast a line or turned a page he loved, and all the world once more became tranquillity.

Perhaps Asenath Snow had leaned somewhat too heavily on the prerogative of her thirty-five years when she evinced an especial

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care for the ordering of his days ; and she was the basic cause of more than one dish of black bass on the parsonage table. For although he recognized the value of her clear sight, he accepted her direction with some reserve when it threatened to trench upon his liberty, and proposed to hold the reins of governance in his own masculine hands.

Asenath had distilled a drop of wisdom from previous commotion, and in the matter of the new library, at least, although she proposed to keep a finger on the helm, she was setting up Caroline Sears as captain. The empty room at the left of the Bristed front door, which had been the repository of Sabrina Pratt's best furnishings and her daughters' after her, was, Asenath knew, the predestined home of the Bradford Lending Library ; yet, as became a maiden, she held to the back waters, and sent forth Mrs. Sears to hail the Bristeds. She knew that Caroline's unpractical tongue was sure to befog the whole enterprise, but were as useful as another to indicate that such enterprise there was, when the clear sun

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of her own reasoning should disclose the scheme compact as she had devised it.

Caroline had found both the Bristeds at home, and was sipping a glass of sangaree while she skirted the edge of her mission.

“So many new books are coming from the press, don’t you think, Mr. Bristed, some standard of good reading should be set in every community?”

“Possibly,” he answered. “But who shall set such a standard?”

“If there could be some room open to the public, some library where only the best literature could be had for a moderate fee. In a small way, my little classes in science and *belles-lettres* practise such an idea. None of us has all the books we use, but each his special books, and then we exchange. It has led us to believe that a whole town might be benefited by some such device. I have not worked it out; but Asenath thinks —” Mrs. Caroline paused, and James Bristed watched her amiable meandering with amused eyes. “Asenath —” But Asenath had said her

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name was not to come into this first interview, and Mrs. Sears interrupted herself with a ladylike cough and placed her empty glass on the light-stand at her elbow. "There are your dear sister's books. If a room, an empty room, could be obtained, those might form the nucleus of a library, and perhaps the ladies of the Lyceum would further the project."

James caught the beam of Asenath's effulgent wit.

"An empty room. I see. Mother, how about our empty front room?"

"Oh, James, I'm sure I don't know!" chirped she. Her white curls danced beneath her cap with the agitation of such a thought. It had been her secret ambition to furnish that room as "best," the seal of its aloofness to be broken only by some supreme function, — her own burial service or James's marriage. "I don't know, James. There would be muddy feet."

"Dear little mother," — when James took that tone she saw the way to her own undoing, — "dear little mother, there are no muddy feet

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in Bradford. I think Mrs. Sears has a good idea which may be worked out to a useful end, and we must help. There is our empty room, — two rooms, — for that large pantry could be used for storage.”

Mrs. Bristed folded her wings, and settled down on the perch of resignation. But she could not restrain a sigh for her shattered dream, as James led the way across the hall to show Mrs. Sears the room which she had always seen in the full panoply of haircloth and wax flowers.

“Asenath thinks—” began Caroline again.

“So Miss Snow approves, does she?” asked James.

“Oh, yes, and we think it might be profitable to give some little social affairs — ”

“To raise money?”

“Yes. Asenath says — ”

“You and Miss Snow evidently have some valuable ideas about the project. Now, why not call a meeting of the ladies here for Tuesday week, and map out your plans? Here are the rooms, and I shall be glad to help you.”

“That is the very thing we — ”

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“Yes, I see. We will talk it all over Tuesday week.”

They shook hands cordially, and James chuckled as he watched Caroline's tall figure get under way. She always moved like a ship that imperfectly answers its helm, and now she yawed a little to the left as an oriole in the sycamore caught her eye; but she safely made the gate where the great elms, which had been named irreverently Nabby and Bethiah after Strabo Pratt's maiden daughters, stood guard, and, amid billowing silk and streaming pennants of scarf and ribbon, went floating off to her next port.

“Dear little mother,” said James again, as he bent over the round figure at the sewing-table, “do you really mind? And anyway we are helpless, for Asenath Snow had planned it all.”



VIII

CAROLINE CLARK had been a slender, dewy girl, with soft dark eyes and fair curls clustering about her oval face, the beauty of her exquisite shoulders and waist revealed by the scantily fashioned dress of her youth. She had married young, as is the way of a maid like her, and no one had remarked her seeking brain for the loveliness of its housing. Richard Sears had built a nest for his bride in the old Seabury house where her grandparents had lived. There the pine woods, with their spicy gifts, crept up from the dunes of the beach,

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and a gorgeous trumpet vine, like some marvel of the East, flung its richness across the low roof and drooped over the trellised porch near the road. A month's short bliss, while his ship was loading, and then they closed the honeymoon cottage and Caroline went back to her old home, and Richard sailed away to win new fortune for his bride. London and Alicante were in his journey, which, alas! should end in no lovers' meeting, for that October a great storm swept the Bay of Biscay, and widowed women wept from Quimper to Bayonne, while in far-off America Caroline Sears waited and hoped and despaired.

Hour by hour her mother lived through the days with her, and her father bound them both in the warm circle of his love. And as the months passed, anguish walked with expectancy toward a future that stood with finger on lip and the promise of sweet argosy in her brooding eyes. Spring came, with lilacs blooming under east windows and the brook tinkling through the greenness of the lower garden, and Caroline had exchanged all her

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bride's hopes for the grace of motherhood. But her thoughts went ranging beyond the little creature at her side; and as she lay in her canopied bed she watched the sun rise above the willows and listened to the birds practising their mating-tunes. The rosy light filled the room and all the world without, and in the great mirror over her dresser she could trace the reflection of green fields and groves, and the blue waters beyond whose ruthless arm had torn away all the joy of her life. The mother's sorrow was echoed in the cadence of her daughter's name: Rachel, she should be; saddest of words, yet with a liquid note of hope. And that hope outsang the sorrow, for Rachel came to be not only a new and dearer child to Elkanah and Mary, but like an elder sister, a mother, rather, to her shy young mother,—a wise, reasonable child, who could companion any age, and yet superintend her own small affairs with the due secrecy of childhood.

Caroline never could be done with wonder at such a complete small person, and her flex-

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ile nature, planned rather for the cherishings of love than for its cares, bloomed in the tender atmosphere of devotion. Then her brain waked up from its dreams, and with no strong maternal instinct to bind her, the active mind turned hither and thither to pick up the crumbs of such learning as fell in its path. She sketched; she sang sweet old melodies to the tinkle of their new-fangled piano; she studied French and Latin with the academy master, a young collegian spilling over with knowledge; she organized all sorts of pretty classes for the village girls. But she had the art to awaken a desire for learning rather than the ability to knit up the frayed ends of her endeavor; and here Asenath Snow, with her executive touch, furnished the pattern for scattering fancies.

Together the two women had made of stay-at-home Bradford an aristocracy of elegant pursuits; and while it was not infrequently the case that the men spoke a homely argot contrasting with the mincing speech of their wives, — most of them had finished their

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schooling at fourteen, — these bluff seafarers let in the winds of the world on the little close to sweep cobwebs away and keep all “ship-shape and Bristol-fashion.” They smiled indulgently, and even with some pride, at the ideas of their womenfolk, but they knew a thing or two themselves beyond the scope of such embroideries.

As Rachel grew to womanhood, she evinced more of the seaworthy qualities of firm judgment and a grasp of essentials than of the ornamental sensibilities of a girl. She had developed into a famous housekeeper after her grandmother died; she could manage Azubah by the nice turn of a finger, give little Mike Connelly a push on the path of duty, and then talk crops with her grandfather, and set straight her mother’s museum of outlandish shells and stuffed birds. At home she was housewife and mother and comrade; but when it came to a long horseback jaunt with her mates, or an early supper in the woods on some night when the great moon rolled up in the east and flung its splendid silver down on pond and winding

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road, she and Polly could give any of the merry company a hint in new ways of fun, and no girl in Bradford loved finery better than the staid housewife Rachel.

Mary Tilt sewed at the Clark house two weeks spring and autumn ; and Rachel evolved wonderful costumes, after the colored prints in "Godey," somewhat tempered by her own fancy, from the silks and fairy gauzes and soft wools which the ships of city uncles brought from the four quarters of the globe. Mary Tilt's nimble fingers flew among the welter of pretty things, while her taste but half approved the outcome.

"Dear suz, Rachel Sears she thinks hard about her clo'es and then has done. An' she's rich, but plain. Now, if she'd have more o' that new trimmin', say ; but that would n't be Rachel. An' she does look pretty as a shell when she's all turned out."

Caroline wore what her daughter appointed, with no clear notion of the means to a result which her poetic fancy approved : for Rachel chose the colors and garments that best suited

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her mother's slender distinction, and saw to it that the mantilla fell not too negligently from sloping shoulders, and tied the leghorn under her round chin in a firm bow.

With her habit of mothering, it was but natural that she should have had an especial care over her harumscarum cousin, Scotto Clark, from his first day at the old farm, when he fell into one of his grandfather's salt vats and emerged looking like a handful of Azubah's sugared simballs, to the later time when he must answer the call of any pretty face, but always came back to Rachel with the instinct of a homesick child.

"There are girls and girls," he used to say. "But you are Rachel. Never let me go, dear coz."

She did not have the eyes to see such selfishness in all its brutal truth; and from the intimacy of boy and girl, they had come into the glamour where youth wakes and loves. All the passionate loyalty of Rachel's heart guarded him the closer as some foolish escapade of his came to light, and he knew always that the

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best in him sought her. In this last year some rumor of John Dillingham's devotion had alarmed his comfortable possessive view of Rachel; and he turned from Polly's laughing eyes to secure a definite promise from her. For while he was sailing away, John would be sailing home; and John, with a calm power of holding to the one thing he meant to have, had worsted him before.

Rachel, as we know, said yes, for she loved him with a passion of tenderness that knew the real creature in that careless tenement, — a man brave and gentle and loving, who saw good with the clear vision of a woman, yet was marred by some deep flaw that might shatter all the bright promise of his nature. She believed that she was his mate: she lacked where he shone, his weakness was her strength. And as sometimes happens, the mother in her had betrayed the woman, and she had promised to marry Scotto when he returned from Germany. John Dillingham had come too late, and, ignoring the pang in his heart, had talked to Polly, and was off again to Antwerp.

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But his father and Mercy Dillingham and old Madam Desire and Cap'n Elkanah were cheated of a dream that had been born with the two children whom they had fancied as born for each other.

"I tell you, mother," said Cap'n Edward to Mercy, "I've set my heart on that match ever since that boy was no bigger than a sprits'l-sheet knot, and here he's gone humbugging about, while Scot's up keeleg and off with the girl like Bob's horse and nobody to pay the reckoning."

"I hope nobody will have to pay it," said Mercy, overlooking her husband's excited metaphor, — "not Rachel, anyway."

Perhaps Cap'n Elkanah was more disturbed than any of them. He had a deep distrust of Scotto's possibilities, and Rachel was the very core of his heart. John, with his quiet, assured deference, was the well-beloved son of his old age, the type and flower of manhood, he thought, to whom, above all others, he would have entrusted his treasure.

"Desire, I'd like to have seen those two

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children married and happy before I pass over," said he one bright August morning, when his old friend was showing him her bed of day-lilies. "I'd planned to give 'em the old Seabury house Caroline was to have lived in. Seem's if it was destined no bride should be happy there again. And then, when we'd all gone, and John had left the sea, he could have farmed it over the three places, Seabury and Clark and Dillingham, and children and grandchildren would have grown up about 'em, and the old homes would have been filled with fresh life. I'd like to think we were at the source of such happiness, Desire, and the old blood renewed and running on in the old places. Scotto's my own, and yet, — well, it's all in God's hands."

"And there we must leave it, Elkanah."

But Caroline, seeing nothing of the currents about her, fared daintily over on the pretty footbridge of her preoccupations. She had a new class in conchology and ancient history, the library was under way and must be fetched into midstream by a poke here

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and a pull there ; Rachel and Polly should be seeing to fairs and concerts to pay for books ; and Rachel was engaged to marry Scotto, as was fitting and proper, and would spend her winters in the city and bring new culture and elegance to the old home every summer. She would some day give her museum to Rachel's children, and Azubah would run the Bradford home under her own supervision, as had always been the case.



IX

ON a clear August evening, John Dillingham was striding along the Quai Jordaens at Antwerp. Behind him were the docks which Napoleon had built when he promised himself that Antwerp should be as “a loaded pistol that I hold at England’s breast.” John walked as far as the old water-gate, and then back to the Quai, and up and down beneath its stiff little row of trees. Ten years before, Antwerp had given him his first glimpse of the Old World of his boyish dreams, and he loved the place as we do love

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what assures us that dreams come true. Since then he had sailed over most of the waters of the earth and had visited many of its shores, but he found that the wise old city held its charm for him. Not that he speculated overmuch as to reasons, and, indeed, was now grinning broadly as he recalled his first morning on shore, when, a little shaver of fifteen, he had eluded the watchful eye of Beriah Pratt, his captain, and dived into the first narrow street on adventure bent. A very hot and dusty little boy had crept back to the ship in the late afternoon.

“Where you been, young snipe?” demanded Beriah.

“I don’t know, sir. Down some little streets and alleys, — rue des Chats, or something like that, one of ’em was.”

John pronounced the name painfully, with a due regard to its letters.

“Cat Alley, is it? Let me tell you, young sir, that them fellers down there are like as not to boil you alive and sell your clo’es to pay for the fuel. Next time you go cruisin’ to

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see what you can see, you better take me along."

"Yes, sir," answered John meekly.

But not for a week's decorous sight-seeing with Cap'n Beriah would he have exchanged the memory of that delirious day among the ill-favored, kindly Flamands, who had crowded him rather closely, but had laughed at the little sailor tricks which he had displayed for their admiration and shared their luncheon with him. It was later he discovered that they had filched all the available spending money he carried in the wallet his mother had given him.

Then Antwerp was all but prostrate after two centuries of the varying fortunes of war, —Spain and Holland and France each had had a hand in that rich pocket; but she had shaken them all off, and in these ten years had gone far on her way to become the *Dives Antwerpia* of the old days.

John walked up and down the Quai, and as he walked his mind ran out into the future. "Work, work: that's what I've got to do;

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and, by the Lord, I'll do it." He barely brushed Bradford memories in passing, and was off again on the road he meant to travel. To-morrow he sailed for Boston; he had discharged his cargo, and was to take the *Sally* home in ballast. Then he had the promise of another ship, and would be off again for the East, for the West, — who cared, so long as there was work and more work? He calculated to be out of the river and well up on his way to the "north-about" by sunset next day, and before he went aboard, he turned to look once more at the city. The exquisite tower of the cathedral, as if a-tiptoe for a last glimpse of the day, sprang above the serrated outline of roofs, and slowly the great chimes began to spell out their lesson, and then filled the whole world with their mellow farewell. As they ceased, John's eye fell on a man who was sauntering along the edge of the Quai.

"Hullo. Where away, Scot?" he called. "Thought you were in Hamburg."

"Well, I'm not," remarked Scotto, as the two shook hands.

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"Business finished?" asked John.

"Pretty near," returned Scot. "I've been picking up some odds and ends." He seemed none too glad to see John, and after their greeting swung away to look at a ship that was bumping in the dock. "That the *Sally*? How'd she go?"

"Oh, fair; but she's no clipper. You never can tell till you get the canvas on 'em. I thought she would be a fast one. Come on board?"

"No. I'm off to meet a man. All well at home when you left?"

"Yes, everything ~~as~~ usual. Asenath Snow cock of the walk, and Polly pretty 'n ever."

"Taking your turn at being smitten?"

There was a rasping note in Scot's laugh.

"No, I'm not. But I hope I've got the gumption to know a lovely little woman when I see one."

"Wish I did n't have ~~so~~ much gumption," remarked Scot with some point.

"Why don't you finish up your business and come home with me?" asked John sud-

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denly. "I planned to be off to-morrow, but I could wait a day or two."

"Thank you, old man, but I can't."

"Look here, Scot," said John, laying a heavy hand on the other's shoulder, "what you got on your mind?"

"Mind? Nothing on my mind. Only hope I can settle up this infernal job."

"You're going home soon? I'll tell 'em that?"

"Of course I'm going. Why under heavens should n't I be going?"

"No reason. Somehow you don't look to me 's if you were going."

"Oh, I'm going. You can tell 'em that safe enough." Scot laughed like the boy he was and gave John an affectionate shove. "Now don't stand there like a bump on a log, a good, pious bump, old John. Go back to your ship, and I'll be on my way. And I may run up to Amsterdam to have a look around before I sail, and I may be off next week with James Howes."

"Good idea," said John. "His mate's broke

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his leg, and he's looking for an extra man."

"Well, bye-bye. Tell the Bradford people, tell 'em —"

"If you go with James Howes, like enough you'll be telling them that I'm on the way. He can beat the *Sally* over and back again."

John watched the light figure swinging off through the dusk.

"Queer Dick!" commented he. "He's got one of his wandering fits or I miss my guess. I'd like to do some kidnapping and get him home somehow."

John sat in his cabin, smoking, far into the night. It was his way to take things as he found them, and then get the best possible out of the material in hand: wherefore he was a gentler judge of Scotto's vagaries than a weaker man would have been. There was no vice in Scot: that he knew. Had there been, he could not have acquiesced in the fate that had turned Rachel to him. But Scot's recurring restlessness was like a fury driving him from all paths of quietude: one moment he was as other men,

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with perhaps a keener mind and a firmer grasp of a given situation than most; and then, suddenly, that ended, he must up anchor and be off to strange adventure. If another sought to lay his will upon him, escape he would at any cost; and when one said to him "You must," that thing in particular he could never do. Especially had he always rebelled at the strong hand of circumstance: that which in the nature of things should be done was enough to send him flying to the antipodes. And to-night John was uneasy because of a deep-seated distrust not admitted even to himself. As the time drew near for Scot's return to Rachel, was he veering off from even such sweet bonds as she would offer him?

Rachel! John's thoughts went wandering on a flowery path. Rachel: but not for him. "If Scot breaks her heart with his careering over the world, I'll have a fall out of him wherever he goes. Perhaps he loves her as well as he knows how. He was n't properly broke: too many trainers and all of 'em too easy. He's bamboozled everybody since the

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day he was born, and he counts on bamboozling 'em to the end." Once more John rounded the circle of Scot's delinquencies and charm: a ne'er-do-weel who was no rake, a yielding creature who was adamant in his selfish will, an affectionate and winsome child likely to work havoc among the greater emotions. "Poor Ray! poor little Ray!" sighed John. "But she may know him better than any of us; at any rate, she'll give him a loose rein." And the thought of his peerless lady forced to the expedients of love sickened him with anger. "She's the one perfect woman," he swore to the night, "and she's got to come down to managing Scot Clark!"

John was not given to imaginative presage, but quite clearly he saw what he had missed. And Rachel Sears had chosen the one creature, who, above all others, was sure to cheat her of the sane devotion of a strong man's love.



X

BUT Scotto did not sail with James Howes, nor was there any news of him after his meeting with John Dillingham. And John made a flying visit to Bradford, and was off again for the Far East. He was loaded for Sydney, and then, if all went well, he was to work his way up to Hong Kong, or, perhaps, take the return cargo at Calcutta. His owners gave him the freedom of his judgment as to place and time. This was only his third voyage ~~as~~ master, but they knew their man. In that last expedition to Antwerp, his shrewd

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common sense had got the better of the Flamands at a bargain; and once, when no more than a boy, he had saved a ship for them by bringing it, practically a water-logged derelict, across a winter Atlantic after her captain, sick and despairing, had given up all for lost.

As the months went by, tongues began to wag at Bradford. Not only was there no wedding, — the rumor had been that Rachel and Scot were to be married that autumn, — but, it was suspected, no news of the bridegroom.

“You need n’t tell me,” said Aunt Zellaphine Mayo. “I surmise that John Dillingham knew more than he told. John’s a good boy, and Scot’s a wanderer; still, John wa’n’t anxious to get Scot home. Maybe he thought that if Scot kep’ away this year, Rachel’d know her mind a little clearer, and pick out the best man in the end. Don’t tell *me*. All’s fair in love ’n’ war.”

Scotto should have returned in September. News came that the business of his journey was accomplished. He had left Hamburg, presumably to take ship at Amsterdam. John

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had seen him at Antwerp. Then it was as if the waters had closed over his head. More tongues came to whisper Mrs. Zellaphine's innuendo : John Dillingham knew more than he told, and John Dillingham could not be home until summer, or it was conceivable that he might be trading up and down among those Eastern ports for another year. Meantime, had he not put Scotto in the way of some scheme that should keep him away from home? But no one heard a syllable of the two from Rachel. With perhaps an accession of dignity she went about her homely duties ; she managed the household and softened the acerbities of Azubah's points of contact with the family ; she played the petted child of old Elkanah, — his " little None-such " he more than ever called her ; she nursed a family of kittens which Mike was concealing from Azubah's predatory expeditions to the barn.

Winter at High Bradford was not the dull season its city cousins pictured. The packet was tied up from November to April, the stage sometimes missed its reckoning when a

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sudden snow clogged the roads ; but the town turned in upon its resources, — “lived on its fat,” Philander Paine said, — and there were doings enough to keep every one out of mischief. This was a bitter winter, as weather went, with the greatest snow of the century, and December came in with an insistent fall, which began with short quick flurries, and before the first night fell was lashed into whirling tempests of sleet.

On that afternoon Azubah had set out to pay her weekly visit to the old mother and sister who lived on a tiny farm among the hills at the west of the town. There a few sheep grazed the wind-swept moors ; in summer tiger-lilies nodded under the gray eaves ; and a flourishing potato field tended by the vigorous hand of old Marm Small lay behind the cow-yard. She raised flax for her spinning, and wove rough petticoats for Azubah and her sister from the wool of her own little flock. A fine old woman of the fast dying-out pioneer stock she was, whose household made small demand upon the village store, and was

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mostly sufficient for its own need. The three old women had had an early tea, and as Azubah set out in the dusk compounded of storm and the dying day, her mother held the candle high behind a sheltering hand, and cautioned her about the path.

“There, there, marm,” said Azubah. “You shut that door. If I don’t know this pastur’ land blindfold, I better stick in a drift till next week.”

But she had gone not a dozen steps before she lost the familiar trail, and groped about in the blind smother until long after night-fall, when, as her stout heart was all but failing, she stumbled on the sheep-gate that led to the highroad and set her face to the long way home. Here she was plunging valiantly through drifts and eddies that threatened from moment to moment to sweep her from her feet, yet keeping her bearings by the familiar patterns of the fences as she pulled herself along, when a halloo came out of the blank behind her.

“Lord Almighty, woman,” roared a voice like the booming of surf, “what you doing out this night?”

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It was the doctor, whose old horse was groping his way home by a leading instinct for bran-mash and warm housing.

“Never you mind what I’m doin’,” yelled Azubah the undaunted. “Ain’t a body a right to see her own mother?”

“You ain’t seeing her in that snowbank, and you’ll never be seeing her again if you don’t get in here quick. No words. In you come.”

He pulled her in by a sweep of his mighty arm, and in a moment she had breath enough for a question.

“Where you been? Jim Chase’s?”

“Yes.”

“What is it?”

“Ten-pound boy, and he like to have come into the world without my help. Lost my way within six rods of the house as much as if I’d been in the Desert of Sahara, and Jonas got stuck in a drift. Been there yet, if Jim’s old horse had n’t whinnied, and put new life into us.”

“Glad it’s a boy,” said Azubah, sticking to the main issue. “They need props.”

She relapsed into the silence of exhaustion,

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and when he deposited her on her own kitchen settle at Cap'n Elkanah's, all but her spirit was sodden with misery. That blazed high, a torch of insurrection, when he counselled bed and a hot drink.

"I ain't dead yet, an' I shan't be dead to-morrer," she announced from the depths of a pulpy "punkin" hood. Mike had appeared from the shed, and she was in no mood to bear his scrutiny of her fallen state. "You git out o' my kitchen with them wet feet," shrilled she, little heeding the rivulets that were making toward the hearth from her island of braided mat. "There, that het me up some," she said, as Mike vanished into outer gloom. And when Rachel reminded her that every one had eaten supper, and she might as well be taking off her wet clothes, she meekly followed her upstairs, and even condescended to bed and hot bricks and a mug of steaming "composition."

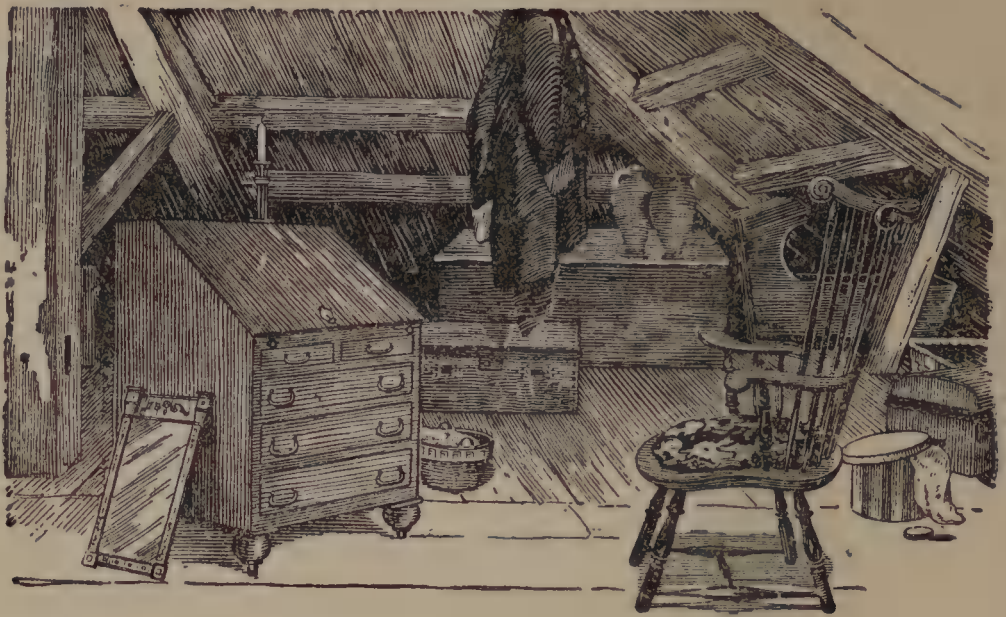
For ten days the storm slackened only to regain strength for new fury. The sky, when it could be seen for the smother, was a low-

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lying pall of gray ; and day and night, beneath the shrieking winds, there was the unceasing monotone of booming surf where it beat on the sands of the outer shore. Even the bay rose and wrecked the breakwater and the pier where the packets made fast. And Bradford might have been on a waste of waters for all it heard of an outer world. Although it knew that disaster walked amid the shoals and cliffs of the shore where the fishermen lived, it could only keep snugly to its own craft and wait for the sun to give it bearings. A heavy south wind usually unblanketed the fields in a week, but it was a fortnight before the stage came plunging through the drifts from the railway, twenty miles up-country, and for the most part of that winter sleighs might have been steered by compass like boats over the submerged landmarks. And by that first stage came a letter to Rachel from Scotto Clark. It was dated at Rangoon.

“DEAR RAY : Forgive me. Yours, SCOT.”

That was all.



XI

IN spite of the snow, the town had been gay that winter. There were the usual gentle diversions of lyceum, sewing-circle, high teas, and dances, and in addition there were three entertainments to make money for the new library,— classical *tableaux vivants*, a lecture, a play. Rachel and Polly, Asenath and Caroline Sears were the backbone of every such enterprise, and the library, already grown to some hundreds of volumes, fed the seeking intellect of Bradford on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons from one to four. Rachel

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and Polly volunteered for alternate months as custodians ; and little Mrs. Bristed, having laid down an extra mat from front door to library room for Bradford's winter feet, retired to the fastness of her sewing-corner, where she could not hear or see the intruders. James had been sorry for the invasion of his mother's privacy ; but after all, he reflected, the visitors were no other than neighbors whom she welcomed on any other errand ; and his real regret was that not many of the " Methodies," at the east end of the town, had used the new books. In the flush of his young liberalism, he knew that they, more than his own flock who might scan the great book of personal adventure on the broad seas, needed what letters could bring them.

And James himself had not been impervious to the soft insistence of beckoning circumstance : for Polly Mayo doled out the books in January, just after the holiday season, when she and Rachel had made high festival for his Sunday-school. He had tried to teach his children love and worship, and Polly, as she

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stood in the light of the Christmas tree, her arm about the neck of the smallest girl who huddled in the soft flow of her brown petticoats like a shy woodland sprite, had looked to him, suddenly, like the embodiment of his pure ambition. Out of his shadowy corner he looked and looked, and knew, as he watched the tender gayety of her service, that he saw his wife.

She had administered the library with a capable hand: Asenath Snow could not have bettered her method. She threw over the list transcribed by Mrs. Sears in a fat book for a cunning device of cards; so, though the Bradford Lending Library should rival that of Alexandria, its custodian could keep the pace without altering the original design of registry. James helped in the process; and while he cut cards from Caroline Sears' drawing-board and ruled them off in brave pink lines, with secret delight he watched Polly as she labored to write the titles there in good round letters instead of the serried lances of the fashionable script.

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And once or twice she had stayed to tea with his mother and him ; and the delicate old china had never seemed so beautiful, the silver had never shone so bright as when those two dear women, the one a rose of youth, the other like an exquisite limning of age, sat at his board and broke his bread. Then he had walked home with Polly, and they had talked of no more, perhaps, than the circulation of books or of discipline in the Sunday-school : yet for each the other seemed to reveal the mystery of Heaven. " It is because he is a minister that he is different from all other men," reasoned Polly. " He makes me want to be good." And once Polly had asked him to come in, and sang to him from the " Southern Harp," wherein new words were set to sweet folk-tunes of the Old World. The wooing, if wooing it were, was as gradual as the ordered dawn ; and when March came around and Polly again presided in the east room at the parsonage, their sky was barely flushed with rose.

The old woman and the girl had made

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swifter strides toward intimacy. Shy little Mrs. Bristed had blossomed sweetly in the soft atmosphere of Polly's deference, and sure proof of an old woman's allegiance to a younger, had even displayed for her hidden stores of household treasures. Together, one spring day, they were estimating some unused mahogany in the garret.

"This cabinet, dear Mrs. Bristed," said the girl, "would be lovely downstairs."

"Yes," sighed her companion. "James's father bought that for our parlor. I should like to arrange in it some fine china ornaments that I have been obliged to pack away."

"And this sofa, and this table; you really have almost a complete set."

"My dear, we get on very well with the west parlor and the middle room for dining." Her thought had reverted to her shattered dream of an unused, but bedecked, east parlor, and she answered that rather than Polly's suggestion.

But the girl knew: Mrs. Bristed longed for a "best room," and her mind went seeking

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a new shelter for the library. She talked with Rachel, and finally they pitched upon a little building which had been the district school-house when their fathers were caned into an understanding of the three R's. They represented the matter to Asenath and Mrs. Sears as a needed change for the growing library. Even James Bristed admitted that it might be wiser to avoid the semblance of a sectarian fount of wisdom: those east-end Methodies might refresh their intellect the sooner. The building had come to be used for the town hearse-house; but a new domicile was found for the chariot of death, and on a fine spring day Cap'n Beriah Pratt borrowed a horse and cart, and by three leisurely transits the library came to its own. The girls had gone a-begging — many captains were at home that spring. The house was bought for a song. Two captains and a mate renewed their days before the mast by turning to and swabbing the walls outside and in with bucketfuls of creamy paint. Old Chips Hall, the town carpenter, who had served under Cap'n Elkanah,

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made the shelves from timber cut and shaped in the sawmill to the west'ard, owned by Cap'n Edward Dillingham. Caroline's class in drawing contributed careful copies of engravings in the current numbers of the "Lady's Book." Polly charmed the Methodies into hemming curtains. And, in short, Bradford had the beginning of a public library, for the committee had determined that the fees should be only nominal, and wealth should be distinguished there by the privilege of putting hand in pocket and paying the bills. During this campaign, Asenath had fallen back somewhat upon the position of chief critic; but she was forced to admit that "those girls had done a good job."

And Polly had not overlooked the reverse of the coin: for in a few weeks Mrs. Bristed had the joy of contemplating the conventions of a parlor, where Mr. Bristed's portrait, painted in Philadelphia when the century was young, hung over the chaste decoration of the mantel, the cabinet bore its predestined treasure of china, a Turkey carpet glowed under-

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foot, gilt-bound "Annuals" and glazed fruits ornamented the corner what-not. With a deep sigh of content she closed the blinds, and left the spot to an isolation to be broken only by some festival of life or death.

It was spring again, and John Dillingham had turned the prow of his ship homeward, and Mercy and Madam Desire had bettered the beautiful ordering of their house against his return. The breakwater had been rebuilt, and the packets had begun their semiweekly trips to the city. Cap'n Elkanah was getting his salt-works into commission, and their mills were whirring lazily in the soft west wind. Mike Connelly was helping at the plough. May-flowers pricked through their woodland blanketings, lilies-of-the-valley were abloom, purple and white lilacs nodded below Rachel's window and made night odorous with tropic scent. But in all these months no more had been heard from Scotto Clark.



XII

CAP'N BELA MAYO loved his peace more than most men; and by a freak of fortune he had married Zellaphine Rousseau, with whom there was no peace. But he had the respite which his time and calling supplied: he was a deep-water captain, and such a one, without scandal or deterrence, might absent himself from the marital yoke for one, two, three years; then, after a short month ashore,—a week if the gyves cut deep,—off he must sail on the free waters by the unquestioned and respectable necessity of pro-

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viding for his family. Cap'n Bela had no certainty of the reputation his wife's tongue might give him; but he was known as a jolly good soul and a fair dealer in every foreign port where he met his mates, and that contented him. Polly was his idol, and he brought her the prettiest folderols that a captain could pick up in Europe or Asia. In summer she went habited in gossamer stuffs a fairy might have envied; in winter the soft silks and wools of Eastern looms wrapped her from the cold. She even had an ermine tippet and muff, and a small string of pearls, and her India embroideries could not be matched in Bradford.

Early in June Bela had returned from a three-years' voyage; and he meant "to stay at home a good long spell this time," he told the conclave assembled at General Philander Paine's.

"This heavin' an' tossin' about 's all right for a young feller, but when a man reaches my time o' life, he best stay put for a while."

Bela was forty-five, and had been a sailor since his tenth birthday.

"You've tossed more 'n most, Bela," re-

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marked Cap'n Edward Dillingham, who sat with his feet on the cold hearth of the Franklin stove. "You better stay anchored this trip till you ground on your beef bones."

"I'll stay till I've had a chance to see something of that little girl of mine."

"So do, Bela, so do. You won't see anything better, go where you will. And it looks to me as if the Reverend James Bristed was coming to our way o' thinking."

"Humph!" grunted Bela.

Polly was as happy as a bird to have her father at home. The two had always been like lovers—with the duenna's eye upon them: for poor Zellaphine had the jealousy that companions a sharp tongue. She knew that she must, inevitably, alienate those nearest her, and the discomfort of that knowledge made her lash the harder. Year in and year out she had walked that wearisome round, and knew no escape; some greater grief or joy, some emotion stirring deeper depths than had yet been touched, must make the tangent for that circle.

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James Bristed had wooed his shy bird with tender art to accustom her to the thought that their natural mating-time had come. For Polly, with all her gentleness, had a wild spirit that would accept no permanent arrangement of things; nor was it in her to trust the vows of man. Perhaps, though she was an embodiment of poetic youth created to waken all the echoes of romance, she had a prosaic little heart that denied the dreams she imaged. And it had seemed to her as if all men must love her a little and no man enough. In truth, they all bowed at that pretty shrine; yet, when one raised eyes of serious worship, the goddess was likely to be metamorphosed into a laughing girl, who teased a little, and then turned upon him a coolly matter-of-fact aspect that was disconcerting to ardor. Was it that lovely Polly lacked imagination or the will to love that she quenched so many flames before they blazed high enough to endanger maiden reserves? She wondered at herself, and even saw herself an old maid.

“I’ll live alone and make socks for Ra-

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chel's babies, and perhaps teach in the Sunday-school." Here she paused for a moment's deflection of thought. "But never, so long as I live, will I manage people like Asenath Snow."

She smiled mischievously. She remembered the ministerial fishing expeditions that followed so unfailingly any fresh onslaught of Asenath's upon the temporal administration of the church.

And James Bristed, with the eyes of true love, saw far into the temperamental difficulties of little Polly.

"Because she is beautiful, she has come to distrust us," he reasoned. "She thinks we love with a flame that dies. Moreover, she likes the freedom and fun of her own sweet way. I will win her gradually to the idea of abiding love, and one day she'll wake to find that love is the air she breathes. Then I'll dare the short-cut to happiness."

And one June evening he had taken that path, and had knocked gently at the low door of her heart.

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That afternoon Mrs. Bristed and Polly had been busy over the retrimming of last summer's Victoria braid bonnet. The old woman had come to look upon the girl as the long-desired daughter, and as a matter of course, appealed to her in the remodelling of gowns and head-dresses. Polly's deft fingers were sewing in a fine lace ruche as a fit setting for her friend's delicate face.

"Not that you need it, with those darling curls," said she. "Why don't we all have silver curls?"

"You'll have them soon enough, dear," answered Mrs. Bristed. "Be content with your own brown ones for a time."

"If I could only be like you or dear Aunt Desire Dillingham," sighed Polly. Somehow in these June days she seemed to be dwelling on the thought of old age and spinsterhood. "But I may grow to be sharp and wizened and crotchety, and the children will call me 'cross Miss Polly Mayo'; and I'll have only an earthenware teapot and a cat for comfort, and I'll wear a calash over my cap in summer, and

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a 'punkin' hood in winter, like Azubah Small, and —"

Polly was whirling away on the freshet of her own eloquence, and Mrs. Bristed laughed gently at the spectacle.

"Dear little daughter," said she, "you're my comfort now, and that's enough. We'll postpone the calash and the cat."

Then it had been supper time, and Maggie Connelly gave them cream-o'-tartar biscuits light as foam. And Mrs. Bristed, the perfection of a fine old gentlewoman in her floating lace, — nothing could persuade her to wear the prevailing widow's cap, — and the white fichu folded away from her neck of withered rose-leaves, poured choice tea into the egg-shell cups. And James watched her and the girl demurely seated between them, and loved both women with a passion of tenderness which his mother read as from an open page and nodded as if he had challenged her consent.

As he walked home with Polly through the warm dusk, he laid his slender scholar's hand upon the little hand that touched his arm.

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“Polly,” he said quietly, “I want it to be always ~~as~~ it has been to-night: you and mother sitting there together, and I loving you both. Just we three,—mother and you and I.”

“Oh!” breathed Polly, in a faint little sigh.

“Yes, dear. Dream on it to-night. We’re waiting for you.”

That was all, save, ~~as~~ they stood at the gate in the lilac hedge, he bent over and kissed the fingers that still rested on his arm.



XIII

FOR a month the town had been brimming with life, for Cap'n James Howes was in port, and all his officers and most of the crew, down to the cabin boys, were Bradford born. Contrary to custom, his men sailed with him voyage after voyage, — a first mate leaving only to become master of a ship, the others stepping up in order ; and their promotion was rapid: for merchants had come to regard the *Imperial* as a valuable training-ship of the best deep-water sailors, and no man made more than two voyages on her as mate before he

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had a ship of his own. Several young captains also chanced to be at home; and as James Howes and his men were soon to be afloat again, the annual picnic was to be celebrated as a send-off to them and a welcome, it was hoped, to John Dillingham, whom a fast clipper ship had reported in the southeast trades.

Every summer, when there were enough young men at home, a woodland festival was held at one of the lakes, which, like burning blue jewels, studded the rolling country of the watershed between sea and bay. Save for an occasional sportsman, no one came to this particular lake, except at the annual pilgrimage of the Bradford young people. It was reached only by tortuous, overgrown wood roads, and seemed more remote from man than in the days when Indians glided through forest paths to the clearings where maize was planted, or beached a canoe on the sands under a shelving bank as they returned from hunting in the heavier forest three miles down the length of the lake. Smiling, dimpling water it ~~was~~ that lapped the miniature curved beaches,

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yet capable of sudden fury when veering winds met in the hills and cut down across the lake in savage squalls.

The morning came, a perfect, breathless summer day; and at an early hour young bucks in linen and pith-helmets were dashing about to carry messages and collect provisions. These seamen drove a horse as they sailed a ship, — crowding on all canvas, with a light hand on the helm; and country plodders threw off the inertia of their customary gait to race like two-year-olds when a sailor held the reins. This was to outshine any previous celebration: some of the captains had even carted two small sailboats to the pond, and, if it breezed up, races were promised to vary the feasting and games of an ordinary picnic. Every kind of vehicle, from low-hung carts to the doctor's tilbury, were pressed into service, and a motley procession wound through the town and over the fields to the narrow wood roads, — a laughing crew they were: the girls, in their multitudinous gauzy ruffles and scarfs, as sweet as roses, as any of the

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bronzed fellows who peered under the big flowered bonnets could have told you.

As it chanced, this befell on the day after James Bristed and Polly walked home through the dusk, and he had kissed her hand, and bade her dream of love. As they left the parsonage, she had expressed some shy hope that he might be at the picnic; but he had promised a visit to a poor sick creature at South Bay: all of which made an excuse for an early morning note to her, wherein he spoke of love and hinted that he might drive up to the pond in the late afternoon or evening and come home with them, — with her, he meant, — and all day he had been dreaming of that journey through the summer night and of the words he might coax to her lips.

But in mid-afternoon, a chaise drove furiously up to the parsonage gate, and Bela Mayo, a figure of haggard woe, knocked at the door. James himself opened to him.

“James Bristed,” croaked the man, fallen since morning from the bloom of a late youth to age, “I have sad news for ye. Polly” —

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he paused, and his eyes widened to the scope of an incredible horror — “Polly lies drowned at the bottom of the pond. And as ye are a man of God, forget yourself, and come with me to tell her mother.”

As the two men drove down the street, James noted that Cap’n Bela was sodden and soaked, the water trickling from him and dripping from the chaise.

“You, too?” he managed to ask with his stiff lips.

“Five on us. A squall slammed us over on our beam ends and rolled us under. The others come up. I dove four times.”

Zellaphine saw them coming, and was at the gate.

“Lord save us, Bela Mayo, what’s happened to you? I told you not to go skylarking with those young people. Got ducked, did ye?”

“There, there, Zellie,” said poor Cap’n Bela, as he clambered from the chaise. “I would n’t. I would n’t.”

Something in the stark faces of the men arrested her. She turned white.

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“What is it?” she gasped. “Polly —”

“Polly cannot come, Mrs. Mayo,” said James slowly.

“Polly — cannot — come? Why?”

“Polly —”

“O Zellie, Zellie,” broke in Cap’n Bela. “There’s only you ’n’ me now. And I guess we’ll have to do some comfortin’ of each other.”

“Bela!” She hardly breathed the name. Then, with a pathetic assumption of her old sprightliness, she turned toward the house. “Bela Mayo, you come right in an’ strip off them wet duds, and I’ll get a hot drink to heat ye up.”

She took him gently by the hand, and as the two sorrowful figures disappeared, James climbed into the chaise and drove off toward the woods.

The glory of the summer day was obscured: great clouds rolled up from the west and north, drops of rain came beating down, thunder boomed along the horizon. And the first flaw in that perfect day had killed his dar-

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ling. James groaned and bowed his head, then urged on the horse ~~as~~ if he yet might save her. Unseeing, he passed the returning pleasure-seekers who had found only grief. They knew — when have neighbors not known the lover? — and drove by silently.

“Don’t know ’s we ought to let him go up there alone,” said one of the men in a low voice.

“Let him be,” answered a woman. “He ’ll come to no harm.”

James drove the horse under a rude shelter built for picnickers, and carefully blanketed him. Then he walked down to the shingly beach, and put off in a little boat he found there. The sailboat had been righted and lay at anchor like a monument to mark the tragedy of the waters. James rowed out to her and climbed aboard. Caught in a rope was a wet little ball, which, mechanically, he picked up and spread out on his knee. “P. M.” he read in one corner of the tiny handkerchief, and groaned again in a moment’s agony.

“No, I mustn’t!” he said fiercely.

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He stood up to look out over the water that was being lashed into a green fury by the storm. Thunder crashed overhead and lightning burned jagged rents in the black clouds. The boat under him tossed and strained at her anchors, and he was half stunned by the increasing commotion. In a moment's lull he looked about him.

“Where, where shall I find her?” he moaned.
“Polly ! Polly !”

Over there to the east, he suddenly saw what looked like a beckoning figure rising above the waters ; then the waves took it and hid it from his sight. With a cry, “God, it’s Polly !” he clambered back to his boat and pulled madly for the spot. Where was it ? Here : but there was no sign. A little farther on, and there he saw something awash on the waves. By what skill he knew not, he took her into his boat and through the shrieking clamor of the storm headed for the shore.

A veil obscured her face — it had been her death ; the draggled finery clung pitifully to her limbs ; a long cloak, heavy to strangle

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and drag down, fell from its clasp at her throat. He wrapped the body of all he loved reverently in its folds, and slowly drove back to the town. "That such should be our wedding journey," he thought, as the rain struck his face and the little body seemed to nestle the closer to his shoulder. Darkness, the darkness of storm and night, had shut them in.

Zellaphine was at the gate before he could alight.

"You have found her." And up the drenched path she led the way.

He bore his love over the narrow stairs and laid her on the white draped bed. Then, awkwardly, as a man might, he loosened the cloak, untied the bonnet, and put back the veil from her face.

Death had come to her too quickly for a moment's pang; and there he left her, sweetly smiling with all youth's promises of joy. Her mother had flung herself down at the beloved feet, and Bela Mayo stumbled heavily up the stairs.



XIV

ON the morning after Polly's death, Rachel knocked at the parsonage door. James Bristed himself, hat in hand as if about to set forth, answered her summons. His face was white, but glowing as if sealed with the sign of a just won battle, the enemy hardly over the border, the victor swaying with the anguish of the fight.

"Rachel!" he said, quite simply.

"Yes, James. Here is something of hers. We found it by her bed. Mrs. Mayo sent it to you."

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“Yes.”

As Rachel turned quickly away, he took the package to his study, and opened it with fingers that may have trembled a little as might a tense cord but then relaxed. It was her girl's Bible: “From Father and Mother to Polly on her tenth birthday.” And between the leaves were two letters: his to her, sent before that wilderness of time that marked the gulf of yesterday, and one that she had written and addressed to him in the soft gush of her joy at the reading of it. She had not trusted to the uncertainty of their meeting; this, in any event, should go to him.

“Dear Mr. Bristed,” it ran. “I am only Polly. But I think — I am your Polly.”

And here was the end of it all.

“James!” There came a soft tap at the door.

“Yes, mother.” He opened to her, and as the tiny woman fluttered up to him, with streaming eyes and hands outstretched, he put his arms about her. “You have lost your daughter, dear,” he said gently. “And I—oh,

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mother, mother." The two clung close, and he bowed his head over her white curls.

Aunt Zellaphine Mayo had been the ministering angel at many a door of birth and death,—her "babies" she called the generation she had ushered across the threshold; and no one ever forgot, who had received it, the inspired service of her hands and heart when irrevocable grief stood without and knocked. As high emotion always carried her above the level of her carping mind, so now the flood of piteous neighborly sympathy rose high and washed away the memory of the pin-prick injuries she had done them; and there was but one thought in town: somehow to give comfort — where comfort there seemed none — to Zellaphine and heart-broken Bela Mayo.

Rachel had been of the party in the boat, and had escaped with a thorough wetting. When they knew Polly had gone, her first thought was for Zellaphine, and, without waiting for the others, she had asked her young kinsman Josiah Seabury to drive her home.

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“They will find her; I know they must find her,” she had said to him. “And I must be ready to go to Aunt Zellaphine.”

But she had had a chill before Azubah could strip her wet clothes from her, and, willy-nilly, had been put to bed in blankets and with a hot drink. Josiah Seabury heard the news of James Bristed’s solitary drive, and then, according to promise, returned to tell her that Polly was found. She had risen on the moment.

“I am perfectly well, and warm, and strong,” she had announced to the protesting Azubah. “And you may tell Mike to put the horse in the chaise, for I am going to Aunt Zellaphine.”

She had found Bela fumbling about the kitchen, impelled by some instinct that tea was required; and then she went to the little white room above, where Zellaphine met her as one turned to stone.

“Oh, the white sand in her hair, the white sand,” she kept saying over and over.

“Dear Aunt Zellaphine, you must let me help you,” said Rachel gently.

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Zellaphine had done no more than hold the dear head to her mother's breast and try to smooth the tangled curls. Together the two women disrobed the little form that lay there like an exquisite marble copy of its rosy youth, and dried the curls, and softly brushed them free. When their work was done, hand in hand they stood and gazed upon their Polly, who was no longer Polly, but such an image of shining peace as it is not often given mortals to see.

"Where is she?" whispered Zellaphine.
"Where has she gone?"

"It is as if she were trying to tell us that she's happy," said Rachel.

She, too, wondered, as had all the race of men, at the detachment of the dead, at the exclusive joy of their withdrawal, at the seal of transcendent peace that marks the familiar creature as already the free citizen of another world than ours. Then she slipped downstairs to find Bela Mayo and send him to his wife.

Among the mourners at Polly's funeral was

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John Dillingham, who had arrived that morning; and with him was a small, handsome, middle-aged man, of fine dress and manner, who looked to be a foreigner. In the long train of the villagers, who passed slowly through the parlor where the "Southern Harp" still was open on the seraphine, the two stood and looked down upon the girl that lay there, decked as if for her bridal in a fairy web wrought by the patient fingers of the Orient, the tiny hands crossed, the dark curls making a nest for the flowerlike head. John, splendid in his height and bronzed man's beauty, paused a full minute as if he were recalling all the memories of her past sweet wilfulness to fit the image of content he saw.

"Where is she?" whispered he, as had the mother.

"*Ciel!* she is beautiful," murmured the man at his side. "Heaven has her!"

The two gave place to Mary Tilt, who had fitted the trailing embroideries to the girlish figure to celebrate some midsummer festival.

"Who would ha' thought it!" she moaned.

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“Who would ha’ thought this was to be the end!”

No one of them ever forgot James Bristed as he looked that day, — an inspired youth of old come to tell them that God reigned, a God of love to everlasting, a Father to poor humanity. “O grave, where is thy victory?” With uplifted hand and head thrown back, he summoned all mortality to answer. “Heaven has her,” the little foreigner had said. And as they listened to James Bristed’s message from the infinite, their sore hearts warmed with the faith that Heaven should encompass them all then and now and thereafter.



XV

FOR Rachel, Polly's death was the cutting of the last strand that moored her to youth. Abloom with life, she knew that the ecstasy of dawn, the thrill of singing birds, the dewy beauty that heralds day, were gone; nor was she ready for the fulness of storm or sun that should follow. Scotto's silence had borne its fruit of insight; but not even to herself did she whisper that here was not all sorrow. She did not believe that he was dead, nor, in the clairvoyant vision that came from the night-long vigils that looked into the plan

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of his life and hers, could she see that harm had befallen; yet, still less, could she see him by her side again, though somewhere in the hidden ways of earth she knew him to be.

“It is ended,” she told herself. And she remembered a sermon James Bristed had preached one autumn, with the one phrase, “the summer is ended,” beating through it in a steady rhythm of finality. “Yes, the summer is ended,” she assured herself, and looked into winter’s peace. “And the spring?” her heart whispered. But she put that aside in the fragrant treasure-chest where unadmitted thoughts are locked.

On an early morning, John Dillingham came to pay his respects to Cap’n Elkanah, and the talk was chiefly of his companion.

“You may guess all day, sir,” declared John, “and then I shall have to tell you who he is. No less than the French cousin of Mrs. Zellaphine Mayo. René Rousseau, if you please, son of Jean and nephew of the René you brought from France, who married Susan

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Freeman, and was father of Zellaphine, and was lost on the *Wild Ranger*."

"And now we shall know the mystery of René Rousseau."

"No mystery, sir. His grandmother was an aristocrat, and his grandfather had offended the *citoyen* who happened to be on top in the particular revolutionary scrimmage at Havre, — Jacques Rousseau was his name. He was locked up and he believed they meant to kidnap René, so he got his wife to waylay you. His own escape was planned; he had secured some of his property — he was a well-to-do merchant — and he meant to follow with her and the baby by another boat. But Madam Guillotine got them both, and the baby, Jean, was rescued by his nurse and brought up as her son. Meantime, no one knew how to find René; but the nurse told Jean about his brother who had gone to America, and when he grew up and married he named his son René. But no trace could they find of a ship sailing on that date."

"I took good care of that," responded Cap'n

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Elkanah grimly. "I marvel even now that I got out of that wolf's den with my life and the gold for my cargo. The officers there had a grudge against me. But it was a good voyage, and not many captains earned their salt at a French port that year."

"Those were great days, sir," said John. "And it was Citizen Robespierre that saved the Dillinghams. If grandfather had n't got that safe-conduct and used it as he did, we'd have come to an end then and there."

"The young dare-devil," assented Elkanah. "To go back to Paris again just to see how things were going."

"Well, he did n't need to see more than Robespierre's head falling into the basket. He beat that news to the barricade — and here we are."

"But where in the world did you pick up René the second?"

"Well, I got caught in a hurricane, beating up through the islands to Hong Kong, — got into the middle of it, in fact. Ever get the feel of that, sir? Calm as a May morning,

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with considerable going on outside. But we managed to head her through somehow, and put in at an island thereabouts to look 'round and get our breath." John paused for a moment. "Little settlement there. Rousseau had hit it while cruising 'round some of the islands—he belongs to a big French house. Those Wee-Wees, the natives call 'em, are trying to beat up a trade down there, but I guess they'll do well to use our clippers for a while yet." John paused again. "Well, I took him to Hong Kong. Of course his name was familiar. We got talking, and we talked a good deal about Bradford. The upshot of it was that he concluded to come home with me to see his relatives, and then take ship back to Havre."

Rachel and her mother came in here, and the story was repeated.

"And he never saw Polly!" sighed Rachel.

"Ah, but he did," said John. "And never did I see a man so moved. 'The last of us all,' he kept saying. 'The last of us all.' He is a bachelor, you know. This morning he's gone over to make himself known to the

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Mayos, and you'll probably be seeing him here soon."

John had greeted Rachel easily enough; but although he had risen to leave when she said she must be going to the village for an errand, he seemed unwontedly shy as they walked up the lane together. He turned off into the path that led across the fields to the Dillingham house, and, as they parted at the stile, he slipped a packet, addressed to her in his flowing hand, into her reticule.

"Open it when you are alone, Rachel," was all he said, and hurried off across the meadow.

It was late afternoon, when they had finished their tea and Mrs. Caroline had gone to confer with Asenath and Cap'n Elkanah was smoking his evening cigar in the west flower-garden, that the leisure moment came for her to break the seal. She was sitting in the winged chair by her chamber window, and in the meadow garden below a bird was trying over and over again his mating-song, as if he improvised trills and roulades that never before had been sung to a soft gray love. "Listen,"

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he seemed to say. "This is the way the thrush or nightingale does it, but I add this, and this, for the very love of love."

As she opened the packet, Scotto Clark's hand stared back at her from the familiar letters of her name. Mechanically, she broke the wafer and unfolded the big square sheets. "Dear Cousin Rachel," she read, and then crossed her hands over the pages and paused as if to listen the more intently to the end of the bird's singing. But her thoughts had travelled back through the years to a little boy with bright gold curls tumbling about his handsome face, who had taught her some of his city games, and it had been "Cousin Rachel," and "Cousin Rachel," all through the summer hours.

"DEAR COUSIN RACHEL." Then, characteristically, he jumped into the heart of things. "Perhaps I'm off on the right tack at last, the best one for both of us. I'm a poor fellow, after all, and not calculated to make a woman happy, — least of all you, with

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your dove's eyes and white soul, and that cool, grave look you have. That's the look you've had for me, Cousin Ray. Yet sometimes, I do protest, I believe you've never loved me or any man, but have just been angel sorry for a poor scapegrace who could seem to steer a straight course only with you shining out of the heavens for him. But I'm off now, dear Ray, and I'm off for good. And I'm not sorry for you, for I'm not the right one and the right one will come.

“Where am I now? I'm king of a South Sea Island. Laugh if you will; but I think my little job is staked out here, and, Lord, Ray, enough fun thrown in to keep a dozen men at the laugh. So laugh you, too, if you like, and I'll laugh with you.

“The devil got hold of me at Hamburg. You know, that particular devil of mine, that makes me kick over the traces and bolt for the open. I'd done father's business to a turn, so I ran down to Antwerp. There John Dillingham saw me. But instead of shipping for home, I went on to Amsterdam, slipped in

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as mate on a South Sea tramp,—all ‘ja-for-yes’ men aboard but me. And I tell you a little Yankee seamanship shined up bright before the end of that voyage, which proved to be at an island not put down on our seventeen hundred and something charts, and I was the only one of the company that made port. We had managed to get too near a typhoon, which pitched us all overboard and sent the poor old tramp to the bottom. I came up safely, got hold of some boards which floated me till sundown. Then I somehow lashed ‘em crosswise, climbed up on ‘em, and paddled along toward the opening of a reef that fetched ‘round a neighboring island. Here a boatful of natives met me head on. They evidently took me for the high panjandrum of the sea, and I took to them as the nearest humans likely to know the whereabouts of food and lodging. For this was my second day out on the loose and food looked good to me. I had time to hope I did n’t look good to them as food. But they proved as mild as cocoanut milk, and kowtowed and salaamed, and I put on the

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high and mighty as well as I could on my cross-bars. They took me into the boat, and now I live in a palace of sorts and institute reforms. And I've managed to knock up a good little trade with Sydney in cocoa-oil. And René Rousseau, Heaven bless him! thinks he can turn something French my way. And I'm sending a prodigal-son letter to father which John Dillingham will back up with talk. We've got enough pearl and tortoise shell here for all hands and the cook, besides the cocoanut. And, Ray, *I've found my place*. And that I've kept the straight course long enough to find it is due to you, dear coz; and that I mean to sail the bowline now, make this little kingdom as good as a Sunday-school and ~~as~~ busy as an ant-hill is owing to you, too. And I'm thinking of setting up your image in the temple in place of Kerasheranoo, or something else like a sneeze, who holds the job now. I don't know why I should n't begin to send 'em along to heaven by that road as well as another. Now you're shocked. But you know I ain't half civilized, — except my clothes, and

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those are Sydney-cut now, — though I'd like to be in order to run this little farm according to Hervey. Remember gran'ther's always taking to that old duck in the spring? If he planted a flower-garden in the fear of the Lord, why shouldn't I run a palm island? A letter goes to father by John. I hope he sees the light of reason, which he never yet has done when it illuminated my particular manly frame. Perhaps you can put in a word for me there, dear Ray, and with gran'ther, too, for you've always understood me from *a* to *zed*, and you'll be reading this just right now. And forgive me and be grateful to me, and I'm now and have been and ever shall be, world without end,

“Your devoted cousin,

“SCOT.”

Rachel gave a little gasp as she finished the document. She folded it carefully, and sat a moment looking out into the garden, which was filled with beauty, like a chalice brimming with the wine of life. Then she

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rose to go downstairs with her news. As she reached the door, she burst into a low laugh, and, with a shining face of joy, ran down like a child who has escaped from some undue necessity.

She found Caroline and Cap'n Elkanah in the flower-garden room, and as the dark, odorous with the breath of evening roses, shut them in, she told her story.

"Bless you for a wise child, now and always my comfort-child," was Cap'n Elkanah's good-night to her.



XVI

RENÉ Rousseau knocked boldly at the Mayo door, and was greeted by Mrs. Zellaphine.

“Nothing to-day, sir,” she said shortly.

As he stood, hat in hand, on the big doorstep, she made sure that his pack was concealed somewhere in the lilac hedge.

“I come to you, *madame*,” said he, in a precise accent that cut the words clean as with a knife, — “I come to you as a kinsman from over the sea. At this moment of your sorrow, I offer you my deep respect. I am René Rousseau.”

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“René Rousseau!” gasped Zellaphine.
“Why, he —”

“He was your father, *madame*, and I am his nephew, a second René.”

As if she doubted that this were not René of the *Wild Ranger* come to revisit the habitude of his youth, Zellaphine led the way into the parlor, one of the few in town which were not sacred to the great occasions of life. She and Polly had used it familiarly, as the pleasantest room they had; and as a neighbor, passing by beyond the lilacs, nodded to them sewing there, the instinctive Bradford comment must be: “Blood will tell. French they are and will be. Only best room in town cluttered up with sewing and such.” Zellaphine had opened all the windows to the sun, and, when René’s knock had roused her, had been standing there, with hands tightly clasped, looking at Polly’s lacquered sewing-table, and seeing nothing but the image of her grief.

“She seems nearest to me here,” she had said aloud. “But I must n’t think yet. I got my work cut out with Bela.”

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Already the impact of sorrow was uniting the husband and wife: she was opening all the treasures of her heart for him, and he was clinging to her like a bewildered child who craves the warm ease of his mother's care. Even in these few days she had coaxed him to the small duties that somehow lead us past the black deeps of grief, and that morning she had sent him out to the garden to look after their early peas.

"I must call Bela," she said, when René Rousseau was duly established.

And when the two men had shaken hands, and René had again proffered a sympathy whose warmth irradiated his formal manner, they returned to the impersonal stories of those old days of the Terror when the elder René had sailed to America with Elkanah Clark.

"I shall pay my respects to the Captain Elkanah, you call him?" said René. "It was a noble heart that must so instantly shelter a little child. We owe him much."

"You'll get none better than Elkanah Clark," said Bela.

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“And that reminds me. I have not told you, no? I came with Captain Dillingham, it is true, but already I had heard of you. There was a fine young gentleman managing that island where we met, a Monsieur Scotto.”

“Scot Clark!” breathed Zellaphine.

“Exactly. A fine man, a splendid man. You should see him rule those natives, gentle souls, but, one may guess, with the treachery of the savage. Love and fear well mingled — there is the secret of his power. They know their master, who makes it most comfortable for them to be good. Yet a warm heart — they feel that — and just. And doing it all with a laugh, like a boy playing at soldiers. A keen mind, also. He will build up a trade, you shall see.”

“Scott to a T. What’d he say about coming home?”

“He regarded Monte Verde as his home, I infer.”

“That jumping-off place! Mention any friend in particular?” Zellaphine’s busy mind was off like a bird-dog scenting quail.

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“In the warm nights we talked much of this little town.”

“Anything said of Rachel Sears?”

“Assuredly. The granddaughter of our Captain Elkanah, is it not? A pearl of women, he told me. A dearly loved kinswoman.”

“Well, I’ll be switched!” was Zellaphine’s comment.

Bela had gone to the window, where he stood smoothing his hair with a clumsy hand, a way he had when bearings were uncertain. In these days, unless he were roused by some sharp contact of the concrete, his mind would be off roaming in a gloom where there was no Polly.

“What you think o’ this, Bela?” said Zellaphine, in a high-pitched, recalling tone.

“I don’t know. I don’t know, Zellie,” he answered absently.

“Well, I know, and I say it’s the beateree of all that’s happened in Bradford yet. King o’ the Cannibal Islands, that’s what Scot Clark is. He and Cap’n Dillingham friendly?” she asked quickly, turning to the little French-

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man, who sat there balancing his shaggy beaver on his knees and looking from husband to wife in polite interrogation. Under the lash of this amazing news, she was regaining a semblance of her old vivacity.

“Doubtless,” replied the suave René. “They met with ceremony, and parted with expressions of mutual esteem.”

“Hum !” commented she.

Monsieur Rousseau rose to take his leave.

“I come at a sad time, my kinsmen, and with a heart of sorrow for your sorrow. I go to your great city to transact affairs which I make there. But I return before sailing for France, when I beg again to pay you my respects.”

“You are kind, sir,” said Bela, the native courtesy of his heart touched by such proffered sympathy. “It is a dark time with us. We would make you more welcome if we could. But Zellaphine and I —” he paused and his lip quivered. Such short days ago it had been always “Polly and I” — “Zellaphine and I are grateful, sir. We shall hope to see you returning.”

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“So that is René Rousseau,” said Zellaphine, as she watched the erect, courtly figure walking away under the willows that overarched the road.

Even now she could think of but one René, and there returned to her some dim picture of childish imaginings. She had belonged so wholly to Bradford that René Rousseau had seemed to her a creature of romance, in no way responsible for her small being,—a fairy prince, who might return, perhaps, to bear her away in a crystal coach. She had listened eagerly to stories of the great Revolution, which had swept him—small driftwood from such disaster—to the far shores of America. And René Rousseau might be any one,—a “markis,” a lord, why not the king’s son, whom Cap’n Elkanah never would believe had been killed? A king’s son: then must she be the Princess Zellaphine. But the little girl, for all her chattering,—she had gone no farther than the first Murray when her mates recognized that Zellie Rousseau could n’t keep a secret,—never told any one of her dreams. It had been

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long years since she had even thought of them. And here was no Prince Charming, but a respectable, middle-aged French merchant.

“That René Rousseau!” said Zellaphine again. She turned from the window, and the first faint watery smile broke through the darkness of her grief.

At dusk the next day, René was paying his visit of acknowledgment to Elkanah Clark.

“Marie, my father’s nurse,” he was saying, — “she taught him to call her mother for safety: *grandmère* she was to me, — Marie told me that my grandmother said to her when she returned from the waterside that night: ‘He has a kind voice, that American, and a strong arm. We have not been deceived in him. He held my little René as a father might have done. Ah, Marie, what if we should all be happy over there in another twelvemonth!’ But in the morning she was taken off to prison, and Marie fled to her people in the country with my father, her foster child. But she always reminded Jean Rousseau that he was of the *noblesse* — Amélie de Lisieux had married

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far below her rank, and she dragged down her husband when the storm burst. Marie managed an education somehow,—there were other gentlefolk living as peasants in that remote village; an uncle in Havre recovered himself when waters were smooth once more; we became merchants, reaching out always for foreign trade. I went to the East to see for myself its riches; chance led me to that small Monte Verde where I met the energetic grandson, Monsieur Scotto, and your Captain Dillingham. And here you see me, Captain Clark, your very grateful debtor for the benefits you confer upon my kin,—my grandmother, Amélie de Lisieux, she must have died blessing the strong man who so unquestioningly sheltered her first born; and my uncle, that youth so sadly dying. And now his granddaughter, the beautiful child, has gone, too. Truly, you of these coasts pay dread toll to the waters. And here am I, the last of my race, to do you homage. Accept it, I beseech.”

The two men were sitting in the old pleasure by the flower-garden room; and Cap’n

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Elkanah had interrupted the flow of the other's narrative by scarcely a question or short comment.

"Truly, this is like a bit of France," said René, as he paused to look about at the vase and the trim borders and the stone balustrade that confined the luxuriance of the rosery. "And you the grand seigneur," he added, bowing to the man beside him.

"A plain American farmer, Monsieur Rousseau," said old Elkanah. His fine face shone in the golden light that filtered through the althea hedge, and he looked to be a very high personage as he sat there in his garden, his great hands, knotted with age, crossed on the ivory tiger-head of his cane. "A man who has ploughed the sea and the land, and found much joy and some little profit to his soul."

At the moment, there came the soft clash of feminine voices, and Mrs. Caroline and Asenath Snow appeared in the arched gateway that opened to the road. With their grace and flowing draperies, they but completed the picture of an olden time. Asenath, in her first

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youth, had never looked more desirable than she did as she stood there waiting for Caroline to secure the gate. Her flowered barège opened prettily over embroidered tucker and petticoat, her cottage bonnet was tied down with a little square bow that framed the roundness of her chin, her brown eyes shone, her cheeks were pink with the excitement of discussing some new scheme for the betterment of Bradford. She had drawn off her gloves, and was smoothing and folding them with her strong white hands. They turned, and Caroline came floating behind her up the path. They hesitated when they saw the men in the rose bower.

“My daughter, Mrs. Sears, our friend, Miss Asenath Snow,” Cap’n Elkanah named them. “Caroline, this is Monsieur René Rousseau, nephew of that René who was your elder brother. Asenath, you are welcome. You will be glad to greet one who should be our friend.”

The four stood talking a moment in the dappled shade and shine of the little garden.

“You have charming women, Captain

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Clark," said René, as Asenath and Caroline disappeared under the trellis of the flower-garden door. "France knows not their like."

"You say truly, Monsieur Rousseau. They are as you see them when waters are smooth; and in disaster, staunch and true, they've fetched many a poor mariner through the storm. My grandchild you must know —"

"Miss Rachel: I have heard, — a pearl of great price. Your grandson, Monsieur Scotto, had spoken of his peerless kinswoman, his tone all reverence and devotion. And Captain John, a silent man; but one could see. It is religion for youth to know such women."

"And age, also, Monsieur Rousseau. She makes the great Love shine bright for fading eyes."

The two talked on of life and death and their rewards through the waning light, and when the night came, René rose to make his adieux.

"Affairs take you to the city, as you say, Monsieur Rousseau," said Elkanah. "That is as it should be. As an honor, I shall commend

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you especially to my sons, good men, fair merchants all. We should be friends, we and you Frenchmen. Perhaps you and I can do our part toward strengthening the old bonds, not for war now, please God, but in amity and for the peaceful interchange of the goods in which each excels. Clark here, Rousseau there, — who knows what we may not do? Go now, but return as our guest, if only briefly, a new son of the house.”



XVII

BRADFORD had settled down to a mid-summer quietude. The news from Scotto Clark was hardly a nine-days' wonder ; nor, in the nature of things, could it be as surprising here as in some inland village, for town gossips were inured to hearing marvellous tales from overseas. General Philander Paine voiced the general opinion : —

“Scot Clark's found his proper job : king of an island where there's plenty to do and no drifting to next port is what he's built for ; and there the Lord, in His wisdom, has steered

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him. And we don't need to worry about Rachel Sears. Guess it 'd always been Rachel's trick at the wheel and a good deal o' slatting canvas. And no hearts broke either side, or I miss my guess. Give us time and fair winds, and we'll see what we shall see before the end of this cruise."

They were seeing very little out of the ordinary. John and René Rousseau had left almost immediately for the city, and Rachel was speaking in a matter-of-fact way of Scotto and his prospects: he had his work cut out for him at Monte Verde, and Uncle Crete could turn trade his way, and John had said the island might prove to be a gold-mine.

"Spirited girl, that Rachel," said Beriah Pratt, in the relaxation of his after-supper smoke. "Head up in the air as if she had n't got the mitten."

"Mitten ! whose mitten ?" snapped Mrs. Beriah. "Rachel never said in so many words they were engaged, and if they were, I guess she's precious glad to be out of it. If she 'd given her word, it 'd have taken a big gale to

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break her moorings. And here's everything to the queen's taste and no fuss. There's no hearts broke, and you can take my word for that, Beriah Pratt."

There was the gist of it : Scot had found his place, there were no hearts broken, and later they should be hearing wedding-bells. But it seemed unlikely that in any immediate future they should hear the wedding-bells for which they listened.

John had stayed ashore but two weeks, and then had taken another vessel back to the Far East with a cargo for Singapore ; and his return cargo, Mr. Crete Clark had directed, was to be secured at Monte Verde Island, — Scotto was to have his chance. Rachel had met John with an unaffected gladness from which an ardent lover could have drawn small comfort. But John, if he were ardent, had the patience of one who has learned when to bank his fires and try the fortunes of the long road. There was an hour for blazing beacons, he guessed, and a time for a man to swing along in the dusk with not too particular a regard for

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chance and change. Carelessly, almost, he had asked Rachel's permission to write to her, and had her promise that she would send him the news to the care of his consignee at Singapore. What more natural for two old playmates? She had written to him on his first voyage to Australia: he had the letter in his wallet with ship's papers and the note his mother had sent him when he shipped as boy with Cap'n Beriah Pratt at the port of Boston.

René Rousseau had concluded arrangements the most satisfactory with Cap'n Elkanah's sons, — an alliance offensive and defensive, which might expand into a great international trading-house, Clark & Rousseau. Then he had returned to pay his sympathetic respects to his afflicted kinswoman, Mrs. Mayo, and to become the guest of Cap'n Elkanah Clark. He had protested that these new business affairs should return him to Havre at the first convenient sailing; but whether he was over-particular as to his ship, or for another reason, August saw him lingering on at Bradford.

“Munseer is a very fine gentleman,” re-

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marked Bela Mayo, to the morning assembly in General Paine's back shop. "Not many strangers could have been what he's been to Zellie and me. A fine gentleman and a fine man, or I'm out o' my reckoning."

"It looks to me, General, as if your niece Asenath might agree with Bela," put in Beriah Pratt, who had a keen eye for small eddies in the current of diurnal happenings.

"My niece Asenath," rejoined Philander stoutly, "has as good a headpiece as I ever saw — good for brains as for looks. If she thought a man was according to rule, I'd vote him in at the next election. And if he'd eyes in his head, he'd agree with me about 'Senath."

"How about relatives in France?"

"Well, France is n't as far as 'Melbun' or Rangoon, and Bradford women have lived on the other side o' the world before now."

"Looks to me's if they had your blessing."

"Have n't been asked. But when you ask me, is René Rousseau a fine man, and would

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'Senath know one if she saw him, I say yes, and I say yes."

"And enough said by any of us," agreed Beriah. "Let 'em work it out themselves; and if out it is, here's to hoping they live in Bradford the best part o' the year, and bring up the children to be Yankee sailors."

It was true that Monsieur Rousseau seemed to find the box-bordered path to Asenath's fan-light door a pleasant one to tread in these summer days. There was an elegance about her house, a space and precision, that refreshed his dreams of well-earned retirement to some country mansion. A merchant he was in the prime of his days; but he would have been no Frenchman had he not pictured a tranquil old age lived out on his own small estate. Asenath received him with a dignity that matched her setting, and he was not slow in recognizing many qualities that French tradition demanded in a wife.

Perhaps his heart had been softened to an unwonted sensibility by the emotion evoked at this time of mingled sorrow and interest;

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and he had been surprised that it was not too old to beat a little faster on that first evening when he had seen Asenath's placid beauty in Cap'n Elkanah's old pleasaunce. Perhaps even then the question "Why not?" had shyly presented itself; and it had not taken many weeks of consideration for him to assure himself that there was no impediment under heaven to a late wooing unless it were a possible reluctance on the part of the lady. To the removal of such a possibility, he was devoting all his ingenuity and many summer hours, as Bradford had not been slow to observe.

He would not have been French if he had not possessed an instinct for the wiles of courtship, but he had the wit to perceive that there would be no easy access to the vestal fastness where his lady dwelt. Asenath had constructed a scheme of living entirely satisfactory to herself; and she would have to see clear and cogent reasons for giving any man right of way to her inner sanctuary. James Bristed could have told René that she was never averse to sallying forth to set such an one on the

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proper road she had descried from her height; and all Bradford had for her hawklike vision respect tempered by the perversity that prefers its own wandering way to the direct path indicated by a superior intelligence. But René Rousseau needed no one to tell him that here there should be no veiling of realities in the glamour of romance; and he set himself to painting the need he had of her to bring about the successful issue of this new alliance of Clark & Rousseau. That, he knew, was his strong card; if she came at all, she must first be lured by the prospect of a situation where she should be the determining factor for success. By August he was assuring her that the new undertaking swung upon that pivot.

“Dear Miss Asenath, I am French, you American. Do you not perceive, is it not true, that you best know the American mind, I the French? You shall interpret for me any difficulty there might be with these Clarks — not that one looks for trouble, no. But there may have to be soundings taken in a fog, as you seafarers might say.”

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Asenath assented easily enough to all this : in any given place she had never doubted her usefulness.

“But Havre,” she objected. “Here is my home.”

When she fell back upon such a defence, he dared to bring up his reserves of sentiment, although he was too keen an antagonist to alarm her by pæans of victory.

“Miss Asenath, we may argue as we will ; but it is your incomparable self I covet, your beautiful and complete womanhood, your warm heart, your judgment ; and I love you too honorably to demand of you cruel sacrifice. But need it be so ? As you say, here is your home, there must be mine. Yet is not the ocean for you sea-folk rather the road that connects than the insuperable wall ? And this new business will often set one upon that road. There is the great house at Havre. Why should we not live there as one might in your city of Boston ? Yes ? And here, for the present, shall be our country estate. Havre and Bradford. And when it comes to old age, does a man not re-

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tire to the country? French or American, we will determine then. French ways are not too unlike the elegant manners of your home; and you have the language to the perfection of a nicety, thanks to your studies with Madame Sears." The little Frenchman was transfigured with the earnestness of his manly desire; and he looked a very courtly wooer as he rose and held out his hands to her in supplication. "Dear lady," he cried, "I throw argument away. I lean only upon the soft mercies of your heart."

Asenath also rose, and gave him her hand.

"Monsieur Rousseau," said she, "you are a fine man. I have not seen your like since my father died."

And so it seemed not impossible that all should befall as Beriah Pratt had predicted. Her woman's heart was stirring to the love that called her; and though René Rousseau should talk but of the advantage of their union, his eyes sent warmer message which hers were beginning to answer. But Asenath's mind must ever be comrade to her heart:

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she saw not only the worth of the man who wooed her, but this new life challenged the adventurer in her seafaring blood, and the cool reason of Yorkshire forebears nodded approval of her capacity to steer in strange waters. Late in August she saw that René Rousseau's way must be hers; by early September he had persuaded her that they should be returning to Havre.

“Next summer, in June, let us say, you shall see Bradford again.” And quite simply, as should a maid who trusts all to her lover, Asenath slipped her hand into his, and said — “I will go.”

Love had them as surely as any moonstruck youth in his train. In spite of the reticence which they deemed the fitting habit of their middle-age, they contemplated the rosy promises of bliss; and René thanked his fortune and the high gods that he had escaped earlier lures to claim this queen of women who, by love's miracle of youth renewed, was blooming here for him.



XVIII

THEY were married in the east room of Cap'n Elkanah's old house, and were to go to the city by the packet sailing on the afternoon tide. Then, after a final consultation with the American branch of Clark & Rousseau, they should cross to Havre on one of the Clark ships. In June, they had promised their friends, they would reopen the Bradford house and make some return of the hospitality showered upon them. For these marriage-bells had startled the town from the tragic gloom induced by Polly's going into a fever of high

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teas. Mrs. Sears, the Dillinghams, the Pratts, General Paine, Mrs. James Seabury had spread forth their best for the feasting, and Cap'n Elkanah had insisted that the marriage should be solemnized at his house.

“That is the fitting place, Caroline,” he had told his daughter. “Asenath should close her house several days before her departure, and if there were no more reason than that you and she had been yoke-fellows in all good works, we should be the ones to stand sponsors at the launching of her joy. And where should René Rousseau be married, will you tell me, but in the house where the first René was a son?”

Caroline had needed no persuading; even Azubah approved, and was prepared to show the town what could be done in the matter of a wedding feast. She impressed Mike, a severely scrubbed but not unwilling servitor, who stoned raisins and ran errands until he vowed that weddings were harder work than spring ploughing. And the old Snow house, close-reefed and all hatches battened down,

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was prepared for the assaults of winter. Mike's father had carted seaweed for a week to bank around the underpinning, every window was nailed, every blind removed — no possibility of slatting canvas there.

"What sun gets in through the curtains 'll keep things sweet," said Asenath, wherein she had the courage of her common sense: for the accepted way was to fetch a house disused to the similitude of a tomb.

Then, with her little hidebound trunks filled with wedding finery, she went to Cap'n Elkanah's, and helped Rachel and Caroline deck the house with a bridal array of trailing clematis and bright autumn flowers and leaves.

"A girl should be married in June," said she to Rachel, as they wreathed a mantel in rose-flushed vines on her wedding morning. "But this is all as it should be for me."

"You do brace us like a sunny west wind in October," answered Rachel, ignoring the issue.

"Dear girl, it has begun, but I am not afraid," observed Asenath, with an unwonted note of sentiment.

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Nor did she look like a woman to fear transitions as she stood before James Bristed that September morning and swore fealty to the worthy gentleman beside her. Warm sunlight flooded the gracious old room where the family portraits smiled down on this festival of another generation than theirs. "Marriage and giving in marriage, — we know," they seemed to say. "Grief and joy and the wisdom of the wise, with heaven's gate at the last." Asenath had always avoided the vagaries of fashion, and to-day she was dressed in flowing brown, and her hair was smoothly folded back from the serious face whose dark eyes, under their level brows, were set so far apart as to give an exaggerated expression of reflection.

"When 'Senath used to make me mad, those eyes of hers always made her look to me like a squirrel," whispered General Paine to his neighbor. "But to-day she's certainly like one of those old pictures at Brussels where the mother of the Virgin is seeing that all goes well."

A calm, wise woman she looked to them all,

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one fashioned for the just supervision of the affairs of men; and they smiled upon René Rousseau, as he stood there in his pride of the natural man who has won the prize of his endeavor.

The wedding feast was spread in the flower-garden room, and toasts were drunk in choice old wines, and Asenath cut such a cake as never was before. Philander Paine and Beriah Pratt kept the ball of wit a-rolling; Cap'n Elkanah made the speech of formal felicitation, and when René Rousseau rose to answer, he looked from one to another of them, last of all at his bride. Then, as if no personal word could voice his gratitude, he raised his glass:—

“I drink to Bradford,” said he slowly, “to the home of warm hearts, fair women, and brave men. The town that welcomes the stranger and gives him its best. May we guard untarnished the fame of her past. May the great God teach us to build for the future.”

Silently they drank the toast. And then the company, after a hearty godspeed to Asenath and the man who had won them as he had her,

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began to break up, and to trickle away, by twos and threes, through the lane where the richness of redundant orchards and ripe foliage perfumed the air.

"Somehow I feel 's if I'd been to a communion service," said Beriah. "I guess this is the sort o' meeting that makes us better neighbors and better men."

James Bristed had read the service and pronounced the solemn marriage benediction in a tone that carried those who heard up to the courts of heaven. Then, before the feasting began, he wished them well, and took his leave. On his way home he stopped to see Zellaphine and Bela Mayo, who had had no heart to join the gentle festivity; but now they ignored the grief which was the metamorphosis of all their personal joy, and James told them of the wedding, and patiently recalled details for Zellaphine's amusement. Then he gave them the great news of the day that touched them more nearly: for René Rousseau had told him that he meant to make a kind of thank-offering to Bradford, which, at the same time, should

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be a memorial to his kinswoman, Polly Mayo. He guessed that the present library building, which had been procured largely through her effort, would soon be inadequate, and he proposed to give a suitable building and endowment for a Free Memorial Library; ground should be broken in the spring on a site directly in the rear of the small building, which later should be removed and the land laid out in flower-gardens and lawns.

That afternoon James and his mother were talking together in her sitting-room. He was standing by the window, which looked out upon the green bowl of a meadow where willows bowed to a reedy brook, and beyond was the swell of an upland pasture bounded by the sharp line of an old rail fence and three sentinel pines silhouetted against the sky. A flaming sunset had resolved the homely picture into a mystery of purple and gold, and, unconsciously, his sore heart was soothed by what he looked upon. They had been speaking of Polly, and her charm, and the ache of missing her, and then the talk had drifted to René

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Rousseau and his library, and so on to the marriage that day.

“Monsieur Rousseau is a rare man,” said James. “Perhaps he’ll rouse us to the truth that new things may come even as the old go, and that we move on according to a plan that must be good.”

“Still, it seems to me that Miss Asenath is very brave,” said Mrs. Bristed, with a note of admiration as for one who had dared the ultimate adventure.

“Yes. But perhaps it does n’t call for special bravery to marry the man she loves. At any rate, she had more romance at the back of that cool head of hers than any of us suspected.”

“It was the heart that proved her master, James, as well as of many a more likely woman.”

“Yes, mother.”

James sighed, and absently tapped the pane as if beckoning to melodies he was to hear no more.



XIX

IT had been a strange autumn,—a succession of warm wet weeks broken by an infrequent crystal day, or, again, melting to midsummer languor. More than ever had it seemed the season of rest after accomplishment, of waiting for an end that might be only the beginning of new life. Most often the day was shrouded in mist, which the warriors of the night drove from the heavens; and never before, it seemed to Rachel, had these blazing guardians of the solitudes of space laid their course so near the earth.

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She could not sleep those nights: it was as if great deeds were abroad, great commotions of eternity which it would be well for mortals to witness; and that dread hour before the dawn, when the old house was like a watch tower looking out upon celestial fields, always found her stirring.

“It is so the old peoples saw them,” she assured herself one night, when the moon had banished timid followers and was swinging along through the farther reaches of space with Orion, the huntsman, and at her shoulder floated a single star, gleaming insignia of hope. In the east burned a constant gentle planet of only lesser magnitude than mighty Artemis, and there some unknown constellation flung its sparkling folds to the horizon. “It is so they saw the high gods at play,” she thought again, and may have envied that simpler imagery. Yet gradually, in these weeks, her whole tranquil being was awaking as if roused by the thrill of a prelusive joy. She had muddled the meaning of things, that she knew. She had mistaken lesser emotions

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for greater. But here was heaven unabashed, and mother earth, with immemorial humorous disregard, moving down her appointed road.

“I’ve been out of step somehow,” thought the girl again and again. “I’ve been bobbing along out of the beat. Gran’ter and mother have pretty nearly spoiled me by their doting.” Wherein she was not wiser or more foolish than many another young creature who has been pushed to gravity beyond the just term of years, and one morning wakes to the simplicity of youth.

It had become entirely evident that the general plan included no deflection for the saving of her cousin Scotto; and her whimsical appreciation of that truth was opening for her a new window on essential values. In November another letter had come from him, wherein, with his old impulse to draw from the well of her sympathy, he had told her of his love for the soft brown belle of his island kingdom, and, moreover, that a visiting missionary had made them man and wife.

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“I’ve got to be a man now, Ray, and stay put,” ran the ingenuous screed. “I’ll dig up cocoanut and shell enough for a fortune, I’m not afraid of that. And this beautiful little creature thinks I’m a fit substitute for her cast-off god, so here goes for straight sailing and a clean bill of goods. These ‘savages’ are whiter men than most of us, and Herman Melville did n’t paint ’em a bit too good. And I don’t mean my little state shall be ruined by vicious whites like ~~so~~ many of these islands. Mr. Missionary is coming back with his family, to teach us all what’s good out there in the old country. He’s the right sort, with a hard head and a warm heart, — but there immigration stops. We and Kooroo and Tooboi and Mahinee will run this ship, and if you think from their names my officers are any fools, you’re the one that’s mistaken. And my little Loo is like a fairy cut in ivory. You see, dear Ray, I’m under bonds to be good, and, somehow, thank God, I don’t want to shake off the bonds. Try to make it all right with gran’ther. I’m writing father. I think the business end

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of it will put me right with him. We've got a fortune here."

So there was something still that she could do for Scotto ; and by a not too fervid reasoning ~~as~~ to the wisdom of his present course, but, rather, a calm assumption that it was the natural path for him to take, she made his peace with Crete Clark and Cap'n Elkanah. Perhaps her own blooming content with things as they were was her strongest argument with her grandfather.

The warm autumn was followed by cruel, gripping cold, with little snow to break the rigor of the frost. Bradford had never known so quiet a winter, and every one sat by the fireside and waited for the spring. But James Bristed found misery to relieve, and Rachel became his lady almoner in many a family where children were gaunt with hunger and cold. He had grown to be a silent man in this year, yet one who was sensitive to the joy and sorrow about him and whose handclasp was worth more than many sermons. A man of strength, his people named him, ~~as~~ he

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moved among them with a keener vision for their needs because of his personal loss. And more than ever, on a Sunday, did he pass by the "wingy mysteries" of doctrine to assure them in all simplicity of an unfailing Love.

"Seems 's if he 'd got to le' go that sheet anchor of faith in the love of God to keep him stiddy," commented Cap'n Beriah.

"You better say he 's feeling his way along a dangerous coast, and there's a light he's sure of," said James Seabury. "That man tests what he preaches. And where he sails, I'll follow."

In the early days of his grief, more frequently than ever, he had stolen away across the fields to the secret solace of his little lake, where he could float or read or fish; but Izaak Walton was less likely to be his companion now than some poet or the measure of his own seeking thought. The reason and necessity for such loss: he paced the weary round that many wiser men than he had walked, and found no relief but in the enfolding heavens, — far reaches of hope, the

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warmth of love, somewhere up there the reason lay. And such comfort as he found he gave his people, who never forgot the messages he brought them out of the sea of his trouble. He sailed there by chart and compass, they knew, and for them as for him the needle pointed steadily to the north.

Bela Mayo and Zellaphine loved him as a son. They had aged years in these few months. It was as if they had grown gray footing the long road together, and there was no talk now of Bela's returning to the sea.

"I've served my term at it," said he, when his mates questioned as to sailing-days, "'nd I'm going to stay home now an' look after Zellie. She needs me more 'n my money."

Which appeared no more than truth, for a gentle and dependent Zellaphine had emerged from the ashes of her grief. More than ever her heart was eager to serve, — no selfish sorrow could choke that divine instinct for ministering, — but the sharp comment of her mind was turned into new paths; and in her gratitude to the neighborly hearts that had

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mourned with her, she set herself aside to think of them. But always Bela came first, as she with him.

“Bela, he’s going to stay home now,” she told Cap’n Elkanah, who had called one afternoon to bring her some especially fine winter apples. “A better husband and provider never sailed the sea; and it’s my turn to save ’n’ manage a mite, so’s we can spend the rest of our days together. We got to count our mercies now.”

Her lip trembled, although, as General Paine had said, “Zellaphine was no moaner when it come to real trouble.”

So it was not all loss for her and Bela. And they looked to James Bristed as a beloved son to lean upon in their vigorous middle-age, and afterward when the years of trembling came.

And for them all — Rachel and James Bristed, the Mayos, and the wider circle which bound the centre of their personal adventure — the time lay fallow, and quietude brooded over the day.

One bitter afternoon James and Rachel were

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walking down the winding road that led to the beach. They had been much together through the past months, drawn into companionship by their young loneliness and the hard new problems it had been given them to unravel. The villagers had begun to gossip a little and to say that John Dillingham best not be sailing the seas too long; but they went their way, and took what pleasure they could from the sympathy each held for the other. No one could enter into his sorrow for Polly as could Rachel, for no one had known so well the rich wholesome soil of the nature from which sprang all that sweet wilfulness, and he could talk freely to her of his loss and learn new beauties of his love. As for Rachel, she made no confidences; but in her quiescent state, she absorbed many useful truths from his sane man's nature.

They were going to the "shore" to see what havoc had been wrought by the floating ice of the bay, and then meant to walk along the beach to Cap'n Elkanah's salt-works, and home by the field path. It was rough footing, for

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the road had been frozen into ridges and hollows, and crackling ice skimmed the deep impressions of some plodder's hoofs. In winter, after the packets ceased running, the way was used chiefly by some belated householder who had delayed gathering the black seaweed to bank around cellar and outhouses until the cold was upon him; and the scene before them was as solitary as a Scotch moor that rises and falls to the dunes of a northern sea. As they approached the beach, a sharp north wind cut their faces, and seemed to blow free the scarlet banners of the sunset. Unconsciously Rachel's mind flashed back to that evening when she and her grandfather had stood on the cliff, and he had told her again of the doomed *Aphrodite*.

"I was a child dreading to be hurt," she thought. "And here I am only glad and free. There was no heartbreak in it, after all."

Then, in quick commiseration, she turned to the man beside her. But he was looking out steadfastly over the churning steely waves that swept the ice cakes up and down.

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“One part of it is finished for me, Rachel,” he said. “But here’s the earth — and heaven up there.”

Then they walked down to high-water line, where the bay had cast up its outermost rampart of gleaming ice that burned with mysterious reflections of the sullen sky. But no harm had been done: and although the angry sea had thrown stray ice blocks far up on the beach, the breakwater held, and the tall framework where the packets flew their signals.

When the afterglow mounted to the zenith in a last defiance to the sombre night that crept up from the east, they set their faces homeward, and walked over the shelving white sands to the cliff where the salt-works stood out against the ruddy sky. And as they walked, Rachel’s heart beat high with hope and with thankfulness to the Wisdom that holds firm the established scheme.

“James,” said she, “I almost want to be old. We’ll be looking back then and perhaps we can see something of the plan.”



XX

WHEN the winter days went melting into spring, Madam Desire Dillingham fell ill. Both she and Cap'n Elkanah had been ailing that winter, and the long-continued cold had sapped the strength of their vigorous old bodies: for the atmosphere in any room, beyond a restricted circle about the fireplace or Franklin stove, congealed the breath, and sunlight, looking wanly in at the windows, had given little comfort to poor humans. In April she had taken to her bed, and Rachel went over to help Mercy Dilling-

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ham with the nursing. Not that the burden was heavy ; but, as Edward had gone to the city on business, Mercy pleaded loneliness, and Cap'n Elkanah, in any event, was glad to lend his "little None-such" as a special gift to his friend Desire. It had been usual for the girl, in other winters, to pay short visits at the house across the fields : for the two families were so closely knit together by association and the ties of blood — Elkanah's oldest son had married a Dillingham — that the children were indiscriminately familiar with "Dilly house" and "lane house." And Rachel, it may be, felt as much filial affection for Mercy as for her own dependent, absent-minded mother whom she must always protect and supervise.

Desire lay tranquilly in the east bedroom, and said she was waiting to be sure that spring had come, and then she should go out into the garden. A little color crept into her soft cheek when she heard the first crows, and soon there was a chirping and twittering about the old house that brought her veracious messages of a mounting sun.

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“I’ll wait for the first flower,” she told Rachel and Mercy. “Then you shall see.”

In the mean time the three women kept cosily within doors, and of a late afternoon Mercy had Molly Connelly bring the supper-tray into the west room and they drank their tea together there. It was a pleasanter thing to watch the spring approach from the house than to go forth and meet it: for as the frost broke, roads were metamorphosed into quagmires, and the air nipped shrewdly, although the sun was lord of all.

“I’d rather do my outdoorsing in the dead of winter,” said Mercy, “and then crawl into my hole until frost and rain and sun get their troubles settled and there’s firm ground underfoot. It’s all very well to talk of spring; but that begins about the middle of May, and is off with the first June rose. We don’t have spring: it’s winter, mudtime, summer, and harvest.”

“Forget your feet, and use your eyes and ears, Mercy,” said Madam Desire, with some tartness, from her bed, “and your nose. Is

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there any smell in the world like that moist springy smell before the first blossom comes, and there's a difference in the air and the sun and the look of the sky, and the birds know it all?"

"I grant you the 'moist,' mother," said Mercy. "But I'll wait for lilacs and roses."

"I have n't even been Mayflowering this year," said Rachel.

"Dear child, you miss her all the time," said Desire softly.

Rachel's eyes filled. So few had appreciated her loneliness in their greater regard for the grief of Bela and Zellaphine and James Bristed's loss. They had thought more of her in her altered relation to Scotto, or of her possible lovers. But it was true that as the seasons swung around, she missed Polly more and more. The two, unlike as they were, had been inseparable, and not a day passed that one did not have some message for the other, some plan where both must have part, some pleasure or expedition shared. So much had they been together that neither had known

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the need for another friend; and Rachel, without Polly, or Scotto, or John, would have felt much like some derelict little craft, battered before her time, and flung on an isolated shore far from the haunts of youth, had it not been for James Bristed's good comradeship.

"Dear Aunt Desire, why do I feel so old?" she asked one day. "What is the trouble? I am not really sad about Polly. She seems safe; and she might have hurt those filmy wings of hers if she'd lived. What is it? I'm not sad."

"Because, dear, the first change has come. We are children until then, whether it comes when we are ten or when we are forty. When death or sharp trouble first looks at us, then childhood goes. Your world was the same world you always knew until this year. And then there was Polly, and James Bristed, — and Scotto," she added hesitatingly.

The girl knelt by the bed and laid her hand on Desire's.

"Dear gammer," said she, in a quick low tone, "I'm happy about Scotto. There's no trouble there."

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"No, dear. Still, there are two gone out of the old life."

"Yes. He'll come back no more than she."

"But they are both safe."

"Yes, both are safe."

In the morning Cap'n Elkanah came over with his first nosegay of the season. Spring after spring he had always brought his first posy to Desire. She was sitting by the hearth in her high-backed rocker, her feet snugly bestowed on a worked cross-stitch cricket.

"You see, Elkanah, I expected you," she said brightly. "I told them I should get up when the first flower came."

Rachel left them together and went to help Mercy about some household task in the middle room.

"I hope neither of them will have the chance to miss the other, Aunt Mercy. How would gran'ther ever get along without her?"

"I don't believe the time would be long," said Mercy. "And somehow I feel that they both think they have got their first summons

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this winter. There has been a change. But you see they're not afraid, so we needn't be."

"No, not afraid; but I want them to have plain sailing now."

"Mother'll rally with the warm days, you'll see, and Uncle Elkanah'll go about his garden; but neither of them will be quite as vigorous as before. They won't speak of going; but one day, with a smile, they'll be gone."

"How unbelievable it is, Aunt Mercy, that it stands there waiting for us. I hope we'll all go with a smile." Her heart stopped a beat, as she remembered the smile on Polly's fair dead face. "So it's not age," she thought, "that makes them glad to go."

"I wish we could hear from John," said Mercy. "No news is good news, and I hope that means he's coming home as soon as a letter could get here. He didn't stop long at Singapore, and very likely Scot had a cargo waiting for him. Those boys will want to make quick voyages between ports, for John's as

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eager as Scot to have that island a success. I believe he 'd take hold and run it himself if Scot gave it up."

"But Scot won't," said Rachel.

"He seems to like it better than anything he's taken hold of yet," assented Mercy.

"Perhaps poor Scot's seemed to be a drifter because he had n't drifted into his proper berth. But he'll stay at Monte Verde, you'll see. Even the climate will keep him, for it will tone down his jumpy nerves. And then we must n't forget the little bride," added Rachel. "She could n't live anywhere else, and he's very much in love."

"For now, yes."

It seemed almost as if Mercy were probing the girl's mind for what she could discover there.

"No, for more than now. He has needed some one to depend upon him for everything, and that's what she must do."

"But do you mean to say he'll never see white people again for the rest of his life?"

"There's the missionary and the traders,

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and if the place succeeds, he can't keep them out. Probably he won't want to try when the right kind of people come. He can regulate all that later."

"You certainly have thought it all out, Rachel."

"Of course I have. And then, you know, Aunt Mercy, I have always believed in Scot."

Mercy gave her a quick look, whether of question or suspicion, and took a tray of cooking-dishes to the outer kitchen.

On a June afternoon Rachel was in the pine wood overlooking Wehasset Pond where the boys had built a rustic bench for her and Polly in their old pirate days. This marked the outermost limit of feminine latitude ; beyond lay the sacred precincts of man's domain. But when a great battle was on, say, between the *Pirate Bride* and Paul Jones's ships, they not infrequently had viewed the scene from this vantage-ground and cheered the victor with shrill squeaks of triumph. To-day Rachel was in a mood of content, — with life, with the bright

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world around her and her appointed place therein ; and her tranquillity was undisturbed by any smallest shaft of introspection. She sat there on the pirate bench, and looked out over the pond, and the green hill with its grazing cattle, and across the bay to the sand cliffs of the opposite shore ; she breathed in the salt air that was enriched by all the perfumes of June, and thought not at all. One hand, thrown over the back of the seat, idly swung her leghorn hat to and fro by its strings, an act more befitting Polly than the old careful Rachel.

Suddenly she had a sensation, too sharp to question, of some new presence, and, hardly turning, she glanced back along the field path. A tall figure was swinging out from behind the farm buildings.

“ Oh, Rachel ! ” he called, as he came.

She did not move ; she could not have done so. It was as if every drop of blood had flown back to her heart, and she had time to wonder if she were faint, and why her wrists felt so limp. She still held the hat by its strings, but

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she was as motionless as a wild creature in its covert.

“Oh, Ray,” he called again.

She did not make a sound as he passed the opening to her piney path. But, as if summoned, he returned, and came striding toward her: and she looked at him, mute and still.

“Here you are, child. Why did n’t you speak?”

“John,” she whispered.

“What’s the matter? You look frightened to death.”

Then she recovered herself with a little laugh, and held out her hand to him across the bench.

“Lady mine!” said he, and bent low to kiss it.

“Where you from?”

“Singapore, Monte Verde, Boston, — sail, steam, stage.”

“You did n’t let us know.”

“No time. I travelled faster than a letter. I had business here.”

“Business?”

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"Yes, madam."

"Oh!"

He sat down beside her and took her other hand, hat strings and all, without relinquishing his grasp on the first.

"Well, Ray?"

"Well?"

"I've come."

"Yes."

"For you."

"For me?"

"For whom else?"

"I don't know."

"Ray!" He shook her lightly by the shoulders. Then his arms slipped to her waist.

"John," said she.

"Yes, love."

"John, I have something to say to you." But there she stopped. Then it came with a rush. "I've been a goose. I thought everything depended upon me. And it does n't. You'll have to be patient. And teach me things."

He laughed, and lifted her face by its pointed chin to look into the hazel eyes.

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“Sweetheart, you’ll teach me what heaven is.”

The boy’s face flushed as unsuspected poetry came welling up from his honest heart; and his blue eyes burned with some picture they saw of green fields and the far reaches of the ocean, and love shining there. He threw his head back and laughed again for the joy of life, the joy of mastery and obedience, the joy of free clean spaces and of work.

Then he took her hands, and said softly: “Soon you and I’ll be together in the little old house; and by autumn, maybe, we’ll go sailing away to the ends of the earth.”

For chief in the scheme of living ~~was~~ their friend the sea.

THE END

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